

# 2015

## Food & Health Survey

Executive Summary



### 10TH ANNIVERSARY



INTERNATIONAL  
FOOD INFORMATION  
COUNCIL FOUNDATION



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The *2015 Food & Health Survey: Consumer Attitudes toward Food Safety, Nutrition & Health*, marks the 10th anniversary of an ongoing investigation into the beliefs and behaviors of Americans. The survey, commissioned by the International Food Information Council Foundation, delves deeply into issues of health and diet, food components, food production, sustainability, and food safety. For ten years, the survey has uncovered important insights and trends. The *2015 Food & Health Survey* continues that tradition, with a special focus on understanding the extent to which Americans value and prioritize their own health.

The *2015 Food & Health Survey* was conducted by Greenwald & Associates of Washington, D.C. The *Survey* was conducted online from March 13 to March 26, 2015. It includes 1,007 Americans ages 18-80, and is weighted to represent the demographics of the United States.

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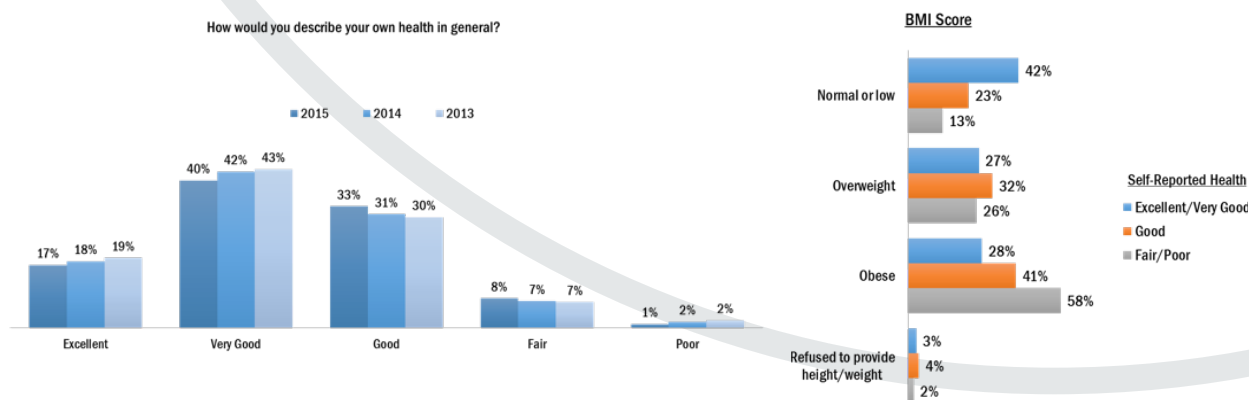
## What is your health worth?

Americans have a lot of priorities to juggle. Consumers want to be healthy, but sometimes it can be hard to fit health-related behaviors into a busy schedule or to invest money into preventive healthcare. Combine that with conflicting health and nutrition advice or negative headlines in the media, and one could easily become overwhelmed.

The *2015 Food & Health Survey* delves into the trade-offs Americans make regarding health and nutrition on an everyday basis. Findings show that a diverse set of factors - health status, gender, income, education, age-influence Americans' level of priorities regarding health, food, and nutrition.

Food and health are topics that Americans clearly care deeply about. In the past year, nearly everyone has thought about the healthfulness of their diet (91%) and the amount of physical activity they get (94%), and half of all Americans have given these subjects *a lot* of thought. In addition, the vast majority of Americans are actively trying to maintain or lose weight (84%).

As in previous years, Americans think that they are in good health. Over half of Americans (57%) rate themselves in “very good” or “excellent” health, and fewer than ten percent rate themselves in “fair” or “poor” health. Americans’ rating of their health status correlates with an actual health condition, as Americans who are currently being treated for chronic disease are more likely to rate their health as fair or poor. However, over half (55%) of Americans who rate their health as “very good” or “excellent” are overweight or obese, indicating that their perception of health status is not necessarily affected by their weight status.



Americans are trying to take control of many aspects of their lives, including their diet and physical activity. Over half try to take some control over the healthfulness of their diet (55%), their weight (57%), or their level of physical activity (55%).

Only a quarter (24%) take *a great deal* of control over the healthfulness of their diet. In comparison, 41% try to take *a great deal* of control over their happiness. Interestingly, the numbers taking control of their diet, weight, and physical activity have decreased about 10 percentage points in two years.

“...over half (55%) of Americans who rate their health as “very good” or “excellent” are overweight or obese...”

So why the gap between thinking about healthfulness and taking action? For many, it is the lack of willpower (37%). Others cite lack of time (31%) or money (26%) as being barriers to meeting their weight management goals. For some Americans, spending the time to track the healthfulness of their diet is a low priority. Nearly half of men spend more time following their favorite sport or team (46%) than tracking their diet. Only a quarter spend more time tracking their diet (27%), and the remaining 27% spend no time on either sports or tracking their diet.

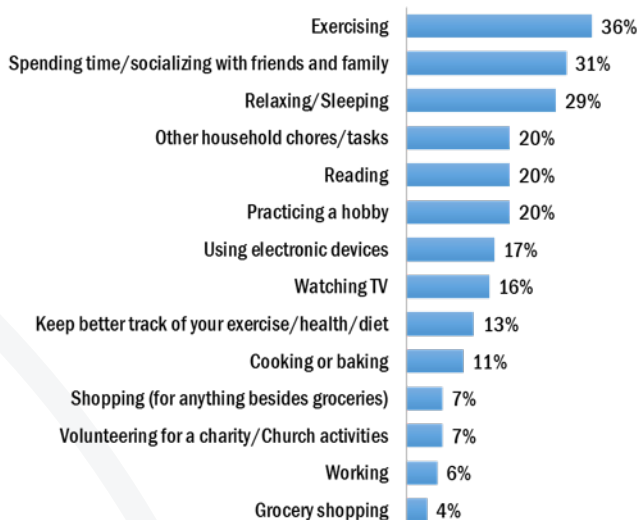
Americans lead busy lives, and are often faced with prioritizing between health-related behaviors and other important activities. So if Americans were given extra money or time, which activities would they choose to prioritize? If they suddenly had an extra four hours every week, some would spend it exercising (36%) but only about one in ten would use any of that time to keep better track of their exercise/health/diet (13%) or spend that time cooking/baking (11%). In fact, more would use that extra time to relax, use electronic devices, or watch TV, than to cook. Findings also show that many Americans are not currently spending much time cooking or preparing meals. One in five (19%) spend less than 15 minutes cooking or preparing dinner on the average weekday. Men especially are spending very little time cooking: nearly three in ten (28%) spend less than 15 minutes each day. Additionally, those who would spend that extra time cooking are the ones who already spend the most time cooking. Similarly, if given an extra \$100 every month, only one in ten would



**...One in five (19%) spend less than 15 minutes cooking or preparing dinner on the average weekday...**



If you suddenly had an extra 4 hours every week, how would you likely spend that time? (Please select up to 3 options.)



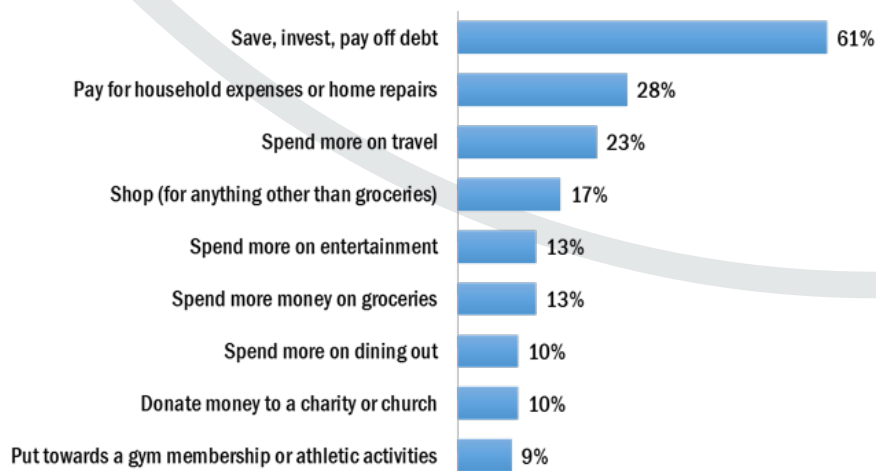
2015 n=1,007



spend any of it on groceries (13%) or dining out (10%). The vast majority would instead save it, invest, or use it to pay off debt indicating financial health is a priority. Even if given a more drastic tradeoff of choosing either to lose \$1,000 or gain 20 pounds, Americans, and especially men, are divided between the options. Even among those actively trying to lose or maintain weight, more than a third would rather gain the 20 pounds than give up \$1,000. However, women are more likely to say they would rather lose the money than gain 20 pounds, especially those who are older and higher income.

“...if given an extra \$100 every month, only one in ten would spend any of it on groceries (13%) or dining out (10%)...”

If you had an extra \$100 to spend every month, what would you likely do with that money? (Please select up to 3 options.)



2015 n=1,007



## Approaches to Weight Management

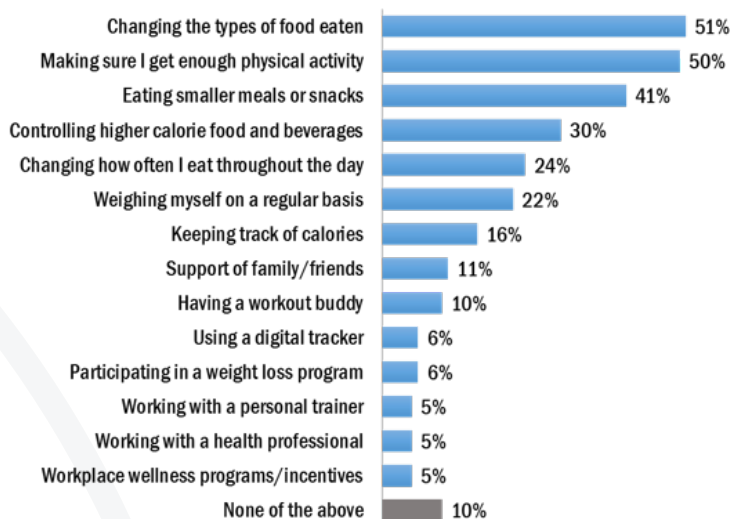
Many Americans are making an effort to choose more healthful options. Eight in ten (82%) have made an effort to eat more fruits and vegetables, with three in ten having made this change in the past year. Similarly, most are trying to cut calories by drinking water or low and no-calorie beverages (76%), eating more foods with whole grains (70%), cutting back on foods higher in added sugars (69%), and consuming smaller portions (68%). In fact, the average American is doing at least 6 of 10 healthful eating behaviors. From a nutrition guidance perspective, Americans are familiar with the MyPlate graphic. Nearly two in three (63%) Americans have seen the graphic and four in ten (42%) report that they know something about MyPlate.

“...millennials are more likely to use a food/diet app, compared to older generations...”

To help them with their weight/diet management goals, consumers most often rely on the support from their family and friends (32%), if anything. Fewer have relied on a weight loss plan or an app to track their food/beverage intake (both 22%). However, millennials are more likely to use a food/diet app, compared to older generations.

Their top motivators are: an improvement in their appearance, increased energy, and improvements in health and wellbeing. They see the two keys to successful weight management as changing the types of food eaten and getting enough exercise.

Which of the following would contribute/has contributed the most to your success in maintaining/losing weight?  
(Select up to 4 options.)



2015 n=1,007

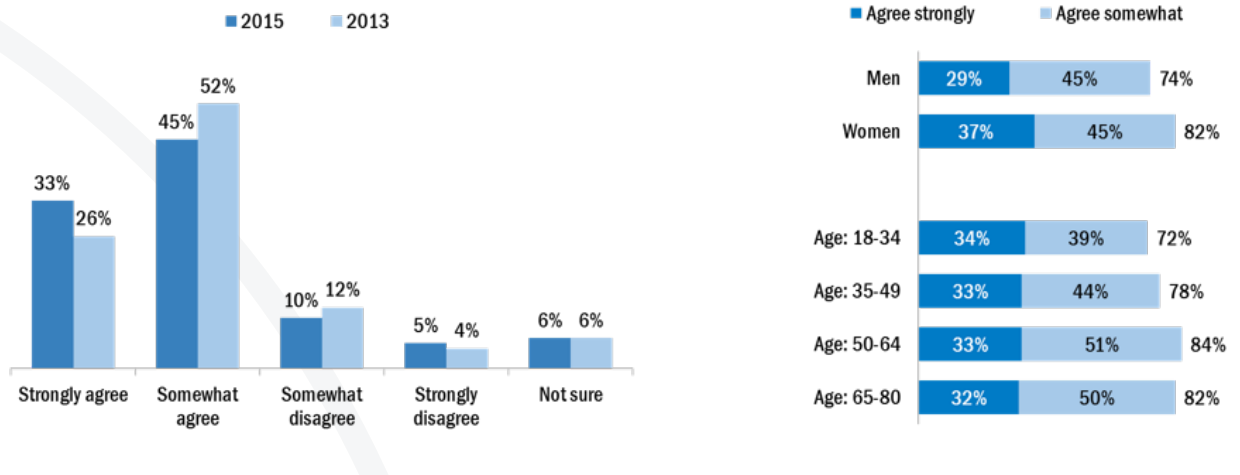


Most noteworthy, however, is the fact that Americans generally prefer a positive, actionable approach and message when it comes to diet: more than three in four (78%) would rather hear what they should eat than what they should not eat. This feeling has grown from just two years ago, with 33% now strongly agreeing compared to 26% in 2013.

“...more than three in four (78%) would rather hear what they should eat than what they should not eat...”

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

“I would rather hear what I should eat than what I should not eat.”





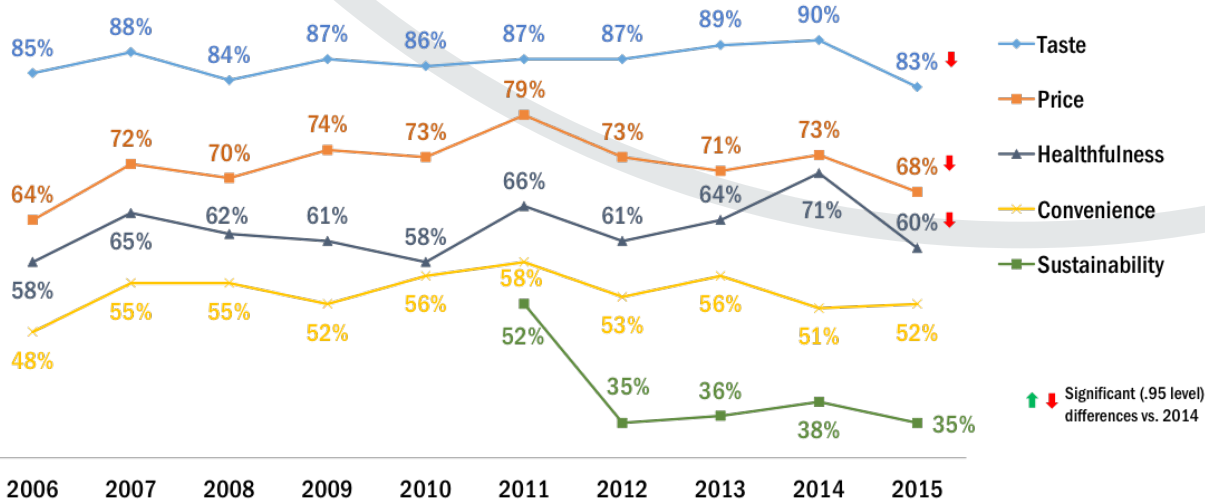
## Purchasing Behavior and Use of Labels

Taste, price, and healthfulness continue to be the biggest drivers of food purchasing decisions, although Americans are feeling less strongly about each of these factors in comparison to 2014. Healthfulness in particular is less impactful after its noteworthy peak last year: in 2014, seven out of ten (71%) rated healthfulness a major impact (4 or 5 on a scale of 1 to 5), but only six in ten say the same this year.

“...Taste, price, and healthfulness continue to be the biggest drivers of food purchasing decisions...”

Millennials expressed an interesting change in purchasing behavior: two years ago they were both significantly more price sensitive and less impacted by healthfulness in comparison to older generations; now they match the other generations on both fronts.

How much of an impact do the following have on your decision to buy foods and beverages?  
(% Rating 4 to 5 on 5-point scale, from No Impact to A Great Impact)



The two key pieces of information used to make purchasing decisions are the expiration data (51%) and Nutrition Facts panel (49%). Women, more than men, look at the Nutrition Facts panel, ingredients list, and serving size information.

Consumers have maintained their confidence in their ability to find information about an ingredient in their food (86% in both 2014 and 2015). More than half (52%) have seen nutrition information on restaurant menus and are using it at least occasionally; only a quarter (23%) have not seen this information at all.

## Protein

Nine in ten Americans say it's important to get enough protein in their diet (89%), and that protein can be part of a heart healthy diet (86%). In particular, consumers see protein as being especially beneficial for a physically active lifestyle. Athletes top the list of groups of people thought to benefit most from additional protein intake, followed by active men and women ages 21 to 45, active teenagers, and active seniors. Other important recognized benefits of protein are: helping maintain muscle during aging (81%) and enhancing recovery from exercise (77%).

More than half (54%) of consumers are trying to get a certain amount or as much protein as possible. Many also say that packaged foods can be healthful sources of protein (50%). Cost is the leading perceived barrier to eating more protein.

“...Nine in ten Americans say it's important to get enough protein in their diet (89%), and that protein can be part of a heart healthy diet (86%)...”

## Dietary Fats

Within the category of dietary fats, omega-3s, as well as omega-6s and omega-9s, are the only fats that register as potentially healthful for a sizeable share of consumers. More than two-thirds (68%) see omega-3s as healthful, with women being most likely to say this. The attempt to consume more Omega-3s is on the rise in 2015, with more consumers trying to get a certain amount or as much as possible than in 2014.



In the past year, three in ten Americans (31%) have changed their opinion about the healthfulness of eating saturated fats, with 3 in 4 (77%) of those seeing them as less healthful than before. Currently, a majority sees saturated fats as not healthful (57%) and nearly half (47%) are trying to limit or avoid saturated fats in their diet.

## Sugars/Carbohydrates

Although the purchasing of sugars and carbohydrates is unchanged, there is more concern and skepticism about these dietary components in 2015. Consumers are less likely to feel that moderate amounts of sugars can be part of an overall healthful diet (68%, down from 74% in 2014) or that people with diabetes can include some sugars in their diet (48%, down from 54%). Meanwhile, consumers are more likely to see sugars as the calorie source most likely to cause weight gain (27%, up from 21%).

Americans focus more on the amount of sugar they consume versus the type (71% and 64%, respectively). However, they are less likely to be concerned about the amount or type of carbohydrates they consume (52% and 51%). In the past year, one in three consumers have changed their opinion about the healthfulness of carbohydrates, with two out of three thinking they are less healthful (65%) and a third seeing them as more healthful (35%).



### Functional Foods

Americans recognize the healthfulness of soy foods. Nearly half (45%) see them as part of a healthful diet, and four out of ten recognize that they are naturally low in saturated fat and cholesterol.

Consumers are generally unsure about the benefits of flavonoids and which foods contain flavonoids. They are most likely to recognize that flavonoids can be found in berries, dark chocolate, and tea, with women and those already in better health are among the more likely to know these sources.

Nearly nine in ten consumers (88%) are giving at least some thought to the ingredients in their foods and beverages. More than four in ten (44%) give a lot of thought to ingredients, with women and those in better health being most likely to do so. More than eight in ten (86%) consumers think that if there was something they wanted to know about an ingredient in their food, they would be able to find the information.



**...More than eight in ten (86%) consumers think that if there was something they wanted to know about an ingredient in their food, they would be able to find the information...**



## Caffeine

Six out of ten (64%) Americans say they know the amount of caffeine that is in the foods and beverages they consume. One in three are trying to limit or avoid caffeine consumption, while one in ten (11%) say they are at least trying to get a certain amount. About half of the population (47%) said they were not sure if naturally occurring caffeine has the same effect as added caffeine.

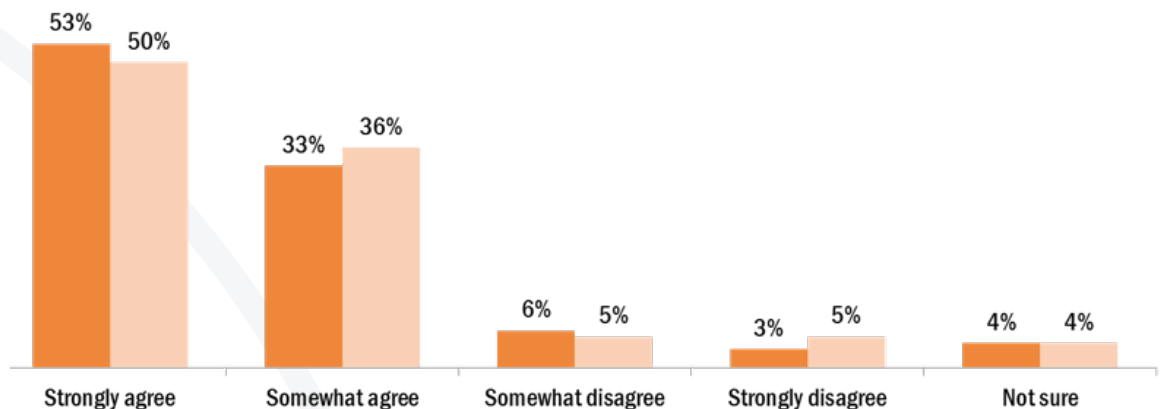
## Low-calorie Sweeteners

Americans are evenly split on whether they think the nutritional content and calorie count of a food or beverage are more important than whether or not it contains low-calorie sweeteners. Nearly one-third think the nutritional content is more important than the use of low-calorie sweeteners (n=498), and about three in ten (29%) agree that the calorie count is more important (n=509).

Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statement:

*If there was something I wanted to know about an ingredient in my food, I think I would be able to find the information.*

■ 2015 ■ 2014



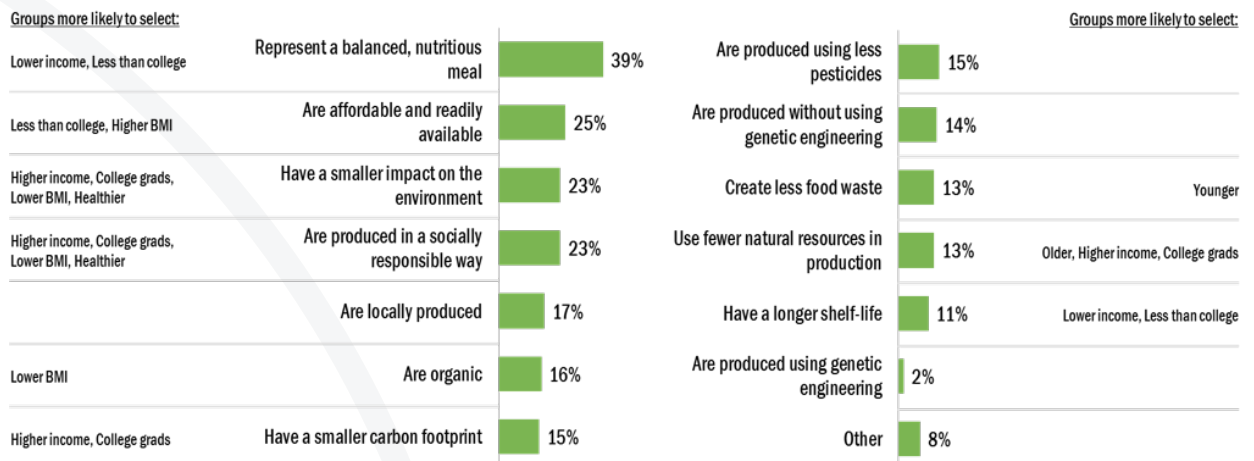


In the past year, nearly two-thirds (64%) of Americans have thought about whether their foods and beverages are produced in an environmentally sustainable way. One in five (20%) think about the topic a lot.

However, thinking about sustainability and acting on it are different things as only one in three Americans (35%) say it has an important impact on their purchasing decisions. Likewise, only 10% of Americans buy foods because they are advertised as ‘sustainably sourced.’ There is little consensus about the meaning of a sustainable diet: 39% see it representing a ‘balanced, nutritious diet,’ 25% say it means foods are ‘affordable and readily available,’ and 23% say it means both that the foods you eat ‘have a smaller impact on the environment’ and that they are ‘produced in a socially responsible way.’

“...Higher income Americans are more likely to buy food because it is labeled as ‘organic’ or ‘locally sourced’ than those with lower incomes....”

A sustainable diet means that the foods you eat...  
(Please select up to 3.)



Most consumers (72%) have given some thought in the past year to the ways the foods and beverages they consume are farmed and produced, with one-quarter thinking about it a lot. And while only 10% regularly buy foods because they have a 'sustainably sourced' label, four in ten (40%) regularly buy foods because they are labeled as 'natural, and three in ten regularly buy foods because they are labeled as having 'no added hormones or steroids' (31%) and 'organic' (30%). Higher income Americans are more likely to buy food because it is labeled as 'organic' or 'locally sourced' than those with lower incomes.



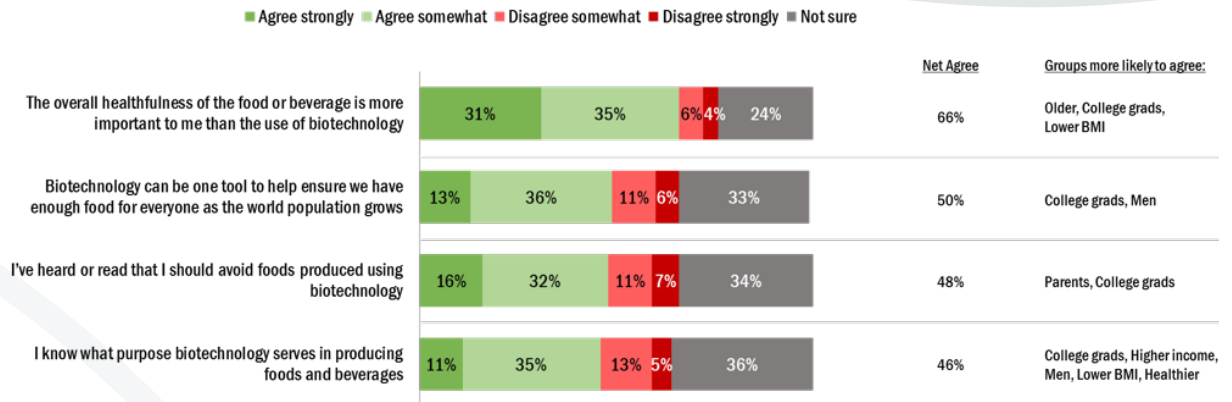
**...Notably, two-thirds (66%) agree that the overall healthfulness of the food and beverage is more important than the use of biotechnology in its production...**



The majority of consumers (51%) acknowledge rising food costs as the primary way that they would be impacted if processed foods were removed from the food supply. Higher income consumers are more likely to see health benefits from removing processed foods from the food supply. 'Convenience' (51%) is cited as the top possible benefit of processed foods, with 'food that stays fresh longer' (44%) and 'affordability' (40%) also ranking highly.

Half of Americans (50%) agree that biotechnology can be one tool to help provide enough food for a growing global population. Notably, two-thirds (66%) agree that the overall healthfulness of the food and beverage is more important than the use of biotechnology in its production.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about food biotechnology? (That is, the use of science and technologies such as genetic engineering to enhance certain attributes of foods?)



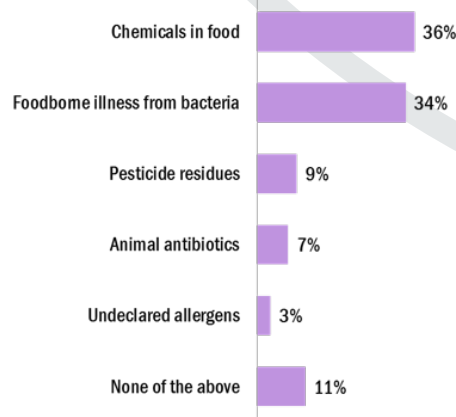
2015 n=1,007



Since 2012, Americans' confidence in the safety of the U.S. food supply has been slowly eroding from 78% in 2012 to 61% in 2015. Now only one in ten (11%) feel 'very confident' in food safety, whereas in 2012, twice as many felt 'very confident' (20%). A large majority of Americans (84%), especially parents and women, say they have thought about the safety of their foods and beverages in the past year.

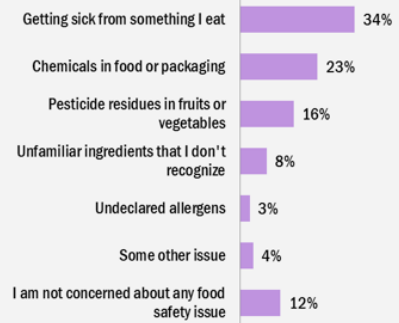
Americans' leading food safety concerns are chemicals in food (36%) and foodborne illness from bacteria (34%). A similar question in 2014 found these to be the top issues as well, but concern about chemicals appears to be on the rise since in 2014, just 23% thought 'chemicals in food or packaging' was a top concern. Americans who cited 'chemicals in food' as their most important food safety issue were less confident in the safety of the food supply. Conversely, those who cited 'foodborne illness from bacteria' were more confident in the safety of the food supply.

In your opinion, what is the most important food safety issue for you and your family today?



2014 Food & Health Survey:

What is the most important food safety issue you consider when shopping for food?



Among those who chose chemicals in food, pesticide residues, or animal antibiotics in food as their top concern, more than four in ten (45%) have made changes to their food purchases because of recent information. News channels and news websites are the go-to source of information about these food safety topics (chemicals in food, pesticide residues, and animal antibiotics), followed by health websites, government agencies, and family and friends. And although personal health care professionals are the most trusted source for food safety information, only 15% have consulted them on this topic.



Two in three Americans are familiar with the Safe Handling Instructions label (67%), and the majority of those familiar with it say they have read it (83%), and have used the information when preparing (76%) and cooking (69%) food. Despite this, fewer than half say they regularly cook to a required temperature (49%) or use a thermometer to check doneness (30%). Similarly, 57% regularly separate raw meat, poultry, and seafood from other ready-to-eat products, and 55% regularly defrost foods in the refrigerator or microwave. In fact, four in ten (39%) say they thaw raw meat and poultry on the counter. Six in ten say they own a food thermometer.

If faced with a food recall, consumers logically are most likely to ensure their item fits the description of the recalled item. A quarter (24%) indicate that they would stop buying all similar items for the time being and one in six (17%) would dispose of all similar items. That said, many consumers (35%) don't remember ever being affected by a food recall in the past and only three in ten (30%) have taken action in response to a recall.





## Answering the question, “What’s Your Health Worth”?

Time, money, health status, age, cultural background: these are just some of the factors that influence how someone will prioritize health-related behaviors. Americans have a lot to juggle, and sometimes health is not the top priority. Still, survey results show that Americans put a good deal of thought towards their health and try to maintain healthful behaviors on a daily basis.

In 2015 we also see the impact of income on consumers’ priorities and purchasing behaviors. Higher income Americans are more likely to buy foods based on how they were produced, to see health benefits from removing processed foods from the food supply, and to be limiting or avoiding many specific food components. Also, if given an extra \$100 every month, lower income Americans are more likely to spend the extra money on groceries than those with a higher income.

With constant media chatter and an ever-changing food landscape, Americans are struggling to find consistent clear guidance for their health and wellbeing. Despite the fact that Americans report avoiding many food components, the overwhelming majority wants to hear what they should eat rather than what they should not eat. Americans need positive, actionable guidance to help healthful behaviors rise to the top of their ‘to do’ list.

## Full Report

The full *2015 Food and Health Survey* findings and additional information are available on the International Food Information Council Foundation's website: [www.foodinsight.org](http://www.foodinsight.org).

## About the International Food Information Council Foundation

### *Our Mission:*

The International Food Information Council Foundation is dedicated to the mission of effectively communicating science-based information on health, food safety, and nutrition for the public good.

## Peer Reviewed Publications

The findings from the first five years of the IFIC Foundation Food & Health Survey have been analyzed and published in peer-review journals:

*Is it Time to Rethink Nutrition Communications? A Five-Year Retrospective of Americans' Attitudes Toward Food, Nutrition, and Health.* Hornick BA, Childs NM, Smith Edge M, Reinhardt Kapsak W, Doohar C, White C. *Is it Time to Rethink Nutrition Communications? A Five-Year Retrospective of Americans' Attitudes Toward Food, Nutrition, and Health.* JAND, August 2012.

*International Food Information Council Foundation Food & Health Survey, 2006–2010, Food Safety: A Web-enabled Survey.* Cody MM, Gravani R, Smith Edge M, Doohar C, White C. *International Food Information Council Foundation Food and Health Survey, 2006–2010, Food Safety: A Web-enabled Survey.* Food Protection Trends. 2012; 6 (32):309-326.

## About the International Food Information Council Foundation

Additional information on the Foundation is available on the “About” section of our website: [www.foodinsight.org](http://www.foodinsight.org).  
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