

HOW MANY VEGETARIANS AND VEGANS ARE THERE?

By Charles Stahler and Reed Mangels PhD, RD

In order to find out how many adult vegetarians and vegans there are in the United States, The Vegetarian Resource Group commissioned YouGov to ask the following question.

Which one, if any, of the following best describes your eating behavior? Please select the option that best applies.

- 1) I never eat meat, fish, seafood, poultry, dairy, or eggs
- 2) I never eat meat, fish, seafood, or poultry
- 3) I usually eat meals without meat, fish, seafood, poultry, dairy, or eggs
- 4) I usually eat meals without meat, fish, seafood, or poultry
- 5) I sometimes eat meals without meat, fish, seafood, poultry, dairy, or eggs
- 6) I sometimes eat meals without meat, fish, seafood, or poultry
- 7) None of these

We classified those that never eat meat, fish, seafood, poultry, dairy, or eggs as vegan. Vegetarians include vegans, plus those that never eat meat, fish, seafood, or poultry. We found in 2022 that six percent of U.S. adults are vegetarian (including vegans), and that three percent of U.S. adults are vegan. Twenty-nine percent of adult Americans sometimes, usually, or always eats vegan meals. Almost 2/3 of the population (63%) sometimes, usually, or always eats vegetarian (including vegan) meals, while only 37% of the population never eats vegetarian or vegan meals. When we look at how many vegan foods there now are in supermarkets and fast food chains, it appears marketers are taking note of this.

More 18-34 year olds, Blacks, and Latinos always plus usually ate vegan (17%, 13%, and 10% respectively) compared to other groups. However, looking at those sometimes eating vegan meals, Blacks and Latinos (15% and 16% respectively) are less likely to report this behavior than Whites (22%). Thus, though there were more Blacks and Latinos than Whites usually or always eating vegan meals (13% and 10% vs. 7% respectively), the combined percentage of those always, usually, and sometimes eating vegan meals was close to the same for Whites (29%), Blacks (28%), and Latinos (26%).

TOTALS

- 3% Vegan
- 3% Vegetarian (not including vegan)
- 6% Vegetarian including vegan
- 6% Usually eats vegan meals
- 6% Usually eats vegetarian meals (not including vegan)
- 20% Sometimes eats vegan meals
- 25% Sometimes eats vegetarian meals (not including vegan)
- 9% Always or usually eats vegan meals
- 29% Always, usually, or sometimes eats vegan meals
- 63% Always, usually, or sometimes eats vegetarian (including vegan) meals
- 37% Never eats vegetarian or vegan meals

Demographics	VEGAN	VEGAN USUALLY	VEGAN SOMETIMES	VEGETARIAN NOT INCLUDING VEGAN
Total	3%	6%	20%	3%
Male	3%	7%	18%	2%
Female	3%	5%	22%	3%
Ages 18-34	5%	12%	18%	5%
Ages 35-54	3%	5%	20%	2%
Ages 55 plus	1%	2%	21%	1%
Northeast*	2%	7%	21%	2%
Midwest	1%	4%	21%	3%
South	3%	6%	19%	2%
West	5%	6%	21%	3%
White	3%	4%	22%	2%
Black	4%	9%	15%	2%
Hispanic	3%	7%	16%	3%

This survey was conducted by YouGov. All figures, unless stated otherwise, are from YouGov PLC. Total sample size was 2,889 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between March 22- 24, 2022 online in the United States. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all U.S. adults aged 18 and over. Results are based on a sample and are subject to statistical errors normally associated with sample-based information. For the above question, with a sample size of 2,889, we can have a 95% confidence level that the percentage of vegetarians (including vegans) is 6% plus or minus 1%, and that the number of vegans is 3%, plus or minus 1%. Though the polls can't be strictly compared as they were done a little differently, in our 2021 VRG YouGov Youth Poll, about 5% of 8-17 year olds were vegetarian (including vegans) and 2% were vegan. See: vrg.org/nutshell/Yougov2021youthteenwriteup.pdf

Be careful when comparing poll numbers to other countries, as questions and definitions of vegetarian and vegan are often different. Our combination of “always” and “usually vegan” is close to some polls we’ve seen in the U.S. and other countries about how many actual vegans there are. Be wary of comparisons, as people can self-define differently when answering questions. This is why we name foods, rather than asking if you are vegetarian or vegan.

*NORTHEAST includes: Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont. SOUTH includes: Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, West Virginia. MIDWEST includes: Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, Wisconsin. WEST includes: Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington, Wyoming.

According to the U.S. Census, [census.gov/quickfacts/US](https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/US) there are about 258 million adults in the U.S., thus about 7.75 million vegan adults, and about 74.82 million adults that always, usually, or sometimes eat vegan meals. Note that since we defined what respondents eat, other polls in and outside the U.S. may have higher figures if they let people self-define terms.

For information on our other adult and youth polls, see vrg.org/nutshell/faq.htm#poll

HOW SHOULD MEAT & DAIRY ALTERNATIVES BASED ON DNA ORIGINALLY FROM ANIMALS BE LABELED?

In addition to the myriad of meat and dairy alternatives that have been around for thousands of years (like tofu, tempeh, beans, etc.) and newly processed alternatives such as Beyond Burgers, there is now increasing development of alternatives based on animal cell DNA, with the technology having many variations. But how should these new products be labeled?

To get a glimpse of people’s thoughts about labeling, we had YouGov ask additional questions. We found out which of the respondents would not label as vegan, products that contained meat, fish, poultry, dairy, eggs, or other animal products. We then correlated responses to respondent groups that were vegan; usually, always, or sometimes eat vegan meals; and who said an item should not be labeled vegan if containing meat, fish poultry, dairy, eggs, or other animal products.

RESULTS QUESTION 2

Meat and dairy alternatives that are made using NO animals or animal products, but are based on animal cells or DNA extracted years ago from a live animal should...

	VEGAN	USUALLY, ALWAYS SOMETIMES EATS VEGAN MEALS	SAID AN ITEM CONTAINING ANY OF THE FOLLOWING IS NOT VEGAN (meat, fish, poultry, dairy, eggs, or other animal products)
Be labeled vegan	38%	37%	29%
Not be labeled vegan**	62%	63%	71%
Be labeled animal-free	25%	38%	37%
Not be labeled animal-free	75%	62%	63%
Be labeled as vegetarian	40%	40%	37%
Not be labeled as vegetarian	60%	60%	63%
Be labeled as plant-based	34%	35%	31%
Not be labeled as plant-based	66%	65%	69%
Be labeled “vegan” “plant-based,” and/or “animal-free” even if containing ingredients genetically identical to a cow’s milk ingredient (like whey) so that it is still considered a milk protein allergen.	26%	34%	28%
NOT BE LABELED “vegan,” “plant-based,” and/or “animal-free” even if containing ingredients genetically	74%	66%	72%

identical to a cow's milk ingredient (like whey) so that it is still considered a milk protein allergen

Include a statement on the package that informs consumers that the product uses animal cell DNA or is animal gene-derived ^{##}	59%	71%	79%
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NOT include a statement on the package that informs consumers that the product uses animal cell DNA	41%	29%	21%
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Over six in ten (62%) vegans didn't want these items labeled as vegan. 62%-65% of those that ate vegan meals (not all those individuals are vegan) didn't want them labeled vegan, animal-free or plant-based, with an even higher percentage at 71% wanting the product to be labeled so it informs consumers the products use animal cell DNA or is animal-gene derived.

** Of all respondents, 65% did not want these labeled vegan, and 66% not plant-based.

68% of the total respondents wanted a statement on the package.

(In the column for those that said meat, fish, poultry, dairy, eggs, and other animal ingredients are not vegan, the margin of error is up to 2.45%. The margin of error for those that always, usually, and sometimes eat vegan meals, is up to 2.29%. For vegans it is up to 10.82%)

As this is new technology for most people, we expect people's ideas to evolve as they learn and discuss more. Which way they change will be interesting to see. What is your opinion?

For more poll information, see <https://www.vrg.org/nutshell/faq.htm#poll>

RESULTS QUESTION 3

Which, if any, of the following products would you NOT label as vegan? Please select all products that you would not label as vegan.

	VEGAN	USUALLY, ALWAYS SOMETIMES EATS VEGAN MEALS	SAID AN ITEM CONTAINING ANY OF THE FOLLOWING IS NOT VEGAN (meat, fish, poultry, dairy, eggs, or other animal products)
Meat or dairy alternatives produced from microbes (such as yeast or bacteria) that have been modified with animal-derived genetic (DNA) material.	42%	40%	53%
Meat or dairy alternatives produced starting from cells or DNA originally from animals, but the cells have been growing outside of animals for years, without further use of animals or animal products.	55%	46%	61%
Meat or dairy alternatives that never used or contained DNA from animals, but were produced by looking at animals cell DNA to reproduce the DNA and copy all the features of the animal product.	32%	25%	27%
Dairy alternatives that do not currently come from animals, but use DNA so a food is produced that is exactly like a component of cow's milk (for example, whey or casein), that some people may have allergies to.	44%	36%	46%

Meat alternatives that do not currently come from animals, but use DNA so a food is produced that is exactly like components in animals meat, so that the resulting meat type food has the same features as animal meat (such as protein and fat)	35%	34%	44%
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MORE RESULTS TO QUESTION 2

Meat and dairy alternatives that are made using NO animals or animal products, but are based on animal cells or DNA extracted years ago from a live animal should...

	TOTAL POPULATION	VEGETARIANS (excludes vegans)	ALWAYS/USUALLY EATS VEGAN MEALS
Be labeled vegan	35%	34%	50%
Not be labeled vegan	65%	66%	50%
Be labeled animal-free	39%	41%	33%
Not be labeled animal-free	61%	59%	68%
Be labeled as vegetarian	39%	47%	48%
Not be labeled as vegetarian	61%	53%	52%
Be labeled as plant-based	34%	24%	36%
Not be labeled as plant-based	66%	76%	64%
Be labeled “vegan” “plant-based,” and/or “animal-free” even if containing ingredients genetically identical to a cow’s milk ingredient (like whey) so that it is still considered a milk protein allergen.	33%	43%	39%
NOT BE LABELED “vegan,” “plant-based,” and/or “animal-free” even if containing ingredients genetically identical to a cow’s milk ingredient (like whey) so that it is still considered a milk protein allergen	67%	57%	61%

Include a statement on the package that informs consumers that the product uses animal cell DNA or is animal gene-derived	68%	66%	55%
NOT include a statement on the package that informs consumers that the product uses animal cell DNA	32%	34%	45%

MORE RESULTS TO QUESTION 3

Which, if any, of the following products would you NOT label as vegan? Please select all products that you would not label as vegan.

	TOTAL POPULATION	VEGETARIANS (excludes vegans)	ALWAYS/USUALLY EATS VEGAN MEALS
Meat or dairy alternatives produced from microbes (such as yeast or bacteria) that have been modified with animal-derived genetic (DNA) material.	35%	41%	36%
Meat or dairy alternatives produced starting from cells or DNA originally from animals, but the cells have been growing outside of animals for years, without further use of animals or animal products.	41%	46%	42%
Meat or dairy alternatives that never used or contained DNA from animals, but were produced by looking at animals cell DNA to reproduce the DNA and copy all the features of the animal product.	22%	21%	27%

Dairy alternatives that do not currently come from animals, but use DNA so a food is produced that is exactly like a component of cow's milk (for example, whey or casein), that some people may have allergies to.	32%	34%	32%
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Meat alternatives that do not currently come from animals, but use DNA so a food is produced that is exactly like components in animals meat, so that the resulting meat type food has the same features as animal meat (such as protein and fat)	31%	39%	31%
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BY EDUCATION/RESULTS TO QUESTION 2

Meat and dairy alternatives that are made using NO animals or animal products, but are based on animal cells or DNA extracted years ago from a live animal should...

	NO HIGH SCHOOL AND HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATE	SOME COLLEGE	4 YEARS COLLEGE
Be labeled vegan	37%	36%	30%
Not be labeled vegan	63%	64%	70%
Be labeled animal-free	40%	40%	35%
Not be labeled animal-free	60%	60%	65%
Be labeled as vegetarian	37%	41%	39%
Not be labeled as vegetarian	63%	59%	61%
Be labeled as plant-based	37%	34%	30%
Not be labeled as plant-based	63%	66%	70%
Be labeled "vegan" "plant-based," and/or "animal-free" even if containing ingredients genetically identical to a cow's milk ingredient (like whey) so that it is still considered a milk protein allergen.	36%	34%	26%

NOT BE LABELED “vegan,” “plant-based,” and/or “animal- free” even if containing ingredients genetically identical to a cow’s milk ingredient (like whey) so that it is still considered a milk protein allergen	64%	66%	74%
Include a statement on the package that informs consumers that the product uses animal cell DNA or is animal gene-derived	61%	70%	76%
NOT include a statement on the package that informs consumers that the product uses animal cell DNA	39%	30%	24%

BY EDUCATION/RESULTS TO QUESTION 3

Which, if any, of the following products would you NOT label as vegan? Please select all products that you would not label as vegan.

	NO HIGH SCHOOL AND HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATE	SOME COLLEGE	4 YEARS COLLEGE
Meat or dairy alternatives produced from microbes (such as yeast or bacteria) that have been modified with animal-derived genetic (DNA) material.	29%	38%	41%
Meat or dairy alternatives produced starting from cells or DNA originally from animals, but the cells have been growing outside of animals for years, without further use of animals or animal products.	31%	45%	48%

Meat or dairy alternatives that never used or contained DNA from animals, but were produced by looking at animals cell DNA to reproduce the DNA and copy all the features of the animal product.	22%	21%	20%
Dairy alternatives that do not currently come from animals, but use DNA so a food is produced that is exactly like a component of cow's milk (for example, whey or casein), that some people may have allergies to.	26%	35%	36%
Meat alternatives that do not currently come from animals, but use DNA so a food is produced that is exactly like components in animals meat, so that the resulting meat type food has the same features as animal meat (such as protein and fat)	25%	34%	36%

BY AGE/RESULTS TO QUESTION 2

Meat and dairy alternatives that are made using NO animals or animal products, but are based on animal cells or DNA extracted years ago from a live animal should...

	18-34	35-54	55 PLUS
Be labeled vegan	43%	31%	32%
Not be labeled vegan	57%	69%	68%
Be labeled animal-free	39%	38%	39%
Not be labeled animal-free	61%	62%	61%
Be labeled as vegetarian	44%	37%	37%
Not be labeled as vegetarian	56%	63%	63%
Be labeled as plant-based	33%	31%	38%
Not be labeled as plant-based	67%	69%	62%

Be labeled “vegan,” “plant-based,” and/or “animal-free” even if containing ingredients genetically identical to a cow’s milk ingredient (like whey) so that it is still considered a milk protein allergen.	35%	31%	33%
NOT BE LABELED “vegan,” “plant-based,” and/or “animal- free” even if containing ingredients genetically identical to a cow’s milk ingredient (like whey) so that it is still considered a milk protein allergen	65%	69%	67%
Include a statement on the package that informs consumers that the product uses animal cell DNA or is animal gene-derived	63%	66%	73%
NOT include a statement on the package that informs consumers that the product uses animal cell DNA	37%	34%	27%

There appears to be several differences by age. So the age old question is whether this is a permanent difference, or if the young will change their views as they get older.

For more polls, see www.vrg.org/nutshell/faq.htm#poll

The contents of this website and our other publications, including Vegetarian and Vegan Journal, are not intended to provide personal medical advice. Medical advice should be obtained from a qualified health professional. We often depend on product and ingredient information from company statements. It is impossible to be 100% sure about a statement, info can change, people have different views, and mistakes can be made. Please use your best judgment about whether a product is suitable for you. To be sure, do further research or confirmation on your own.