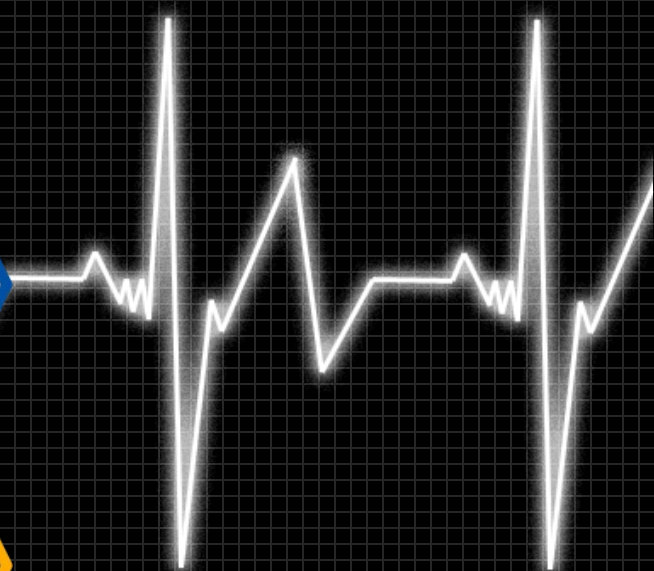


# 2014 Food & Health Survey

The Pulse of America's Diet:  
From Beliefs to Behaviors



*Executive Summary*



INTERNATIONAL  
FOOD INFORMATION  
COUNCIL FOUNDATION

# More Americans Choosing Foods, Beverages Based on Healthfulness

The 2014 *Food & Health Survey: Consumer Attitudes toward Food Safety, Nutrition & Health*, commissioned by the International Food Information Council Foundation, is the ninth annual national quantitative study designed to gain insights from Americans on important food safety, nutrition and health-related topics. The research provides the opportunity to better understand how Americans view their own diets, their efforts to improve them, how they balance diet and exercise, their knowledge of food ingredients and components, their beliefs when it comes to food safety, and their behaviors across all of these fronts.

The 2014 *Food & Health Survey* was conducted by Mathew Greenwald & Associates of Washington, D.C. This 28 minute, web-based survey was fielded in March 2014. The survey respondents were reflective of the demographics of the U.S. population, and while the sample was very close to the target demographics, the data were weighted to match the demographics of the U.S. population.

This *Survey* offers the important voice and insights of the consumer for health professionals, government officials, educators and other interested individuals who seek to improve the lives and health of Americans.

This year, healthfulness closed the gap behind taste and price as the top determining factors of American's food and beverage choices. Consistent with previous years, more than nine out of ten consumers have given at least a little thought to the healthfulness of their foods and beverages, and half have given a lot. Taste continues to be the leading driver of food and beverage selection, with 90 percent of consumers reportedly influenced by taste, the highest percentage in the survey's nine year history. However, while taste and price (73%) remain relatively unchanged from historical trends, healthfulness (71%) has jumped 15 percent since 2010. Healthfulness

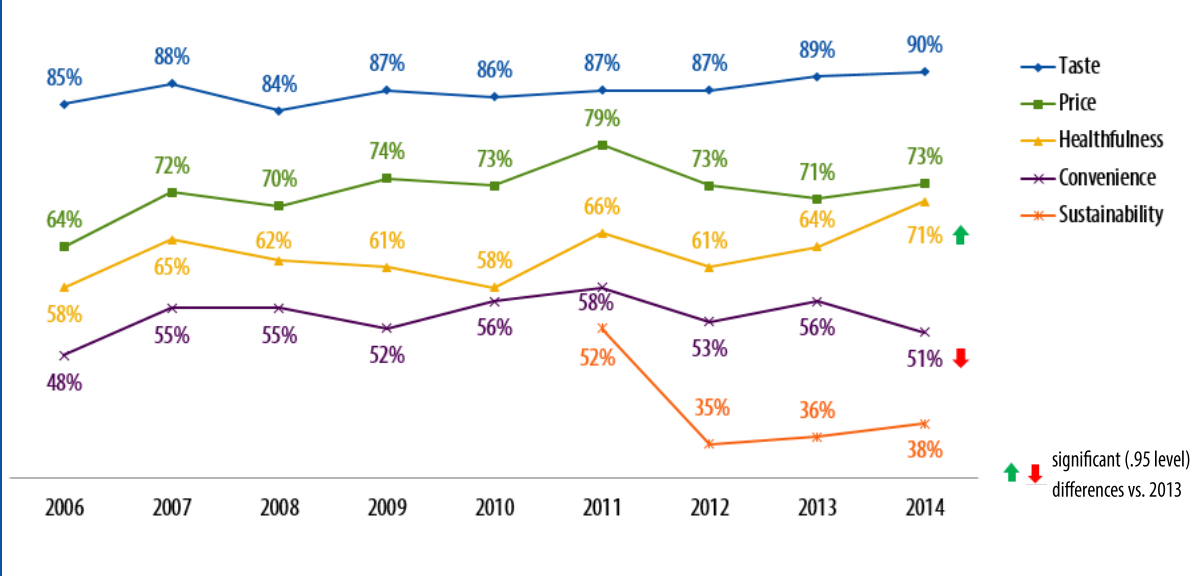


## INTERNATIONAL FOOD INFORMATION COUNCIL FOUNDATION

impact increased across all age, ethnicity, education, and socioeconomic demographic groups, but the rise is most pronounced among younger consumers and men. Younger consumers are also more likely to be influenced by convenience, which dropped from 56 percent to 51 percent since 2013. Sustainability has less of an impact on food and beverage selection than the other four factors, but is still a determinant for 38% of the population, particularly women.

Consumers are taking many steps to improve the healthfulness of their diet. As in 2013, eating more fruits and vegetables is the most common effort Americans report taking to improve their diets. Nearly one out of three consumers have begun eating more fruits and vegetables within the past year, and just over half have been trying to do it for more than a year. Other efforts Americans are attempting include: cut calories by drinking water, low - and no-calorie beverages (79%), eating more foods with whole grains

How much of an impact do the following have on your decision to buy foods and beverages?



## Survey also shows fewer than 1 in 4 having “emotional” conversations about food.

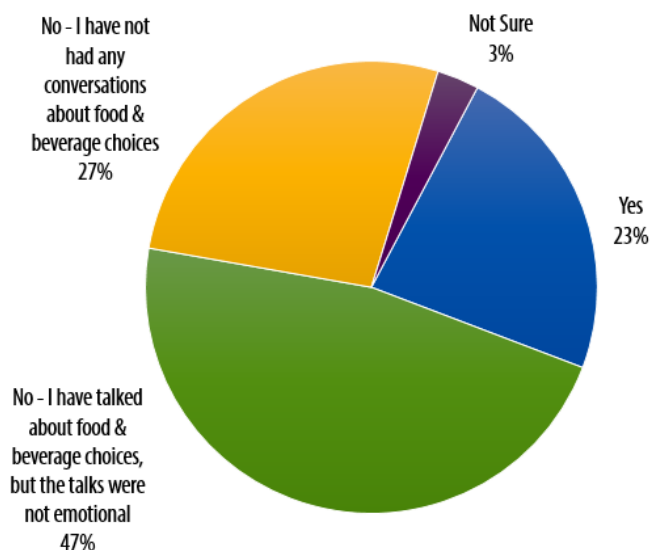
(72%), cutting back on foods higher in added sugar (70%), cutting back on foods higher in salt (67%), consuming smaller portions (66%), cutting back on foods higher in solid fats (62%), comparing sodium in foods like soup, bread, and frozen meals and choosing the foods with lower numbers (58%), balancing calories to manage my weight (57%), cutting back on full-fat dairy and replace with low- or no-fat alternative (55%).

Overall, Americans generally believe healthfulness of diet is just as important as other priorities in life. While the majority say that spending time with loved ones is more important than having a healthful diet, 40 percent feel that eating a healthful diet is more important than having an active social life. Many Americans view having a healthful diet as equally as important as getting enough exercise (61%), minimizing stress (49%), having a healthy financial situation (46%), and feeling fulfilled at your job (46%).

Additionally, as consumers are giving more value to healthfulness, the dialogue around food and beverage choices remains mostly pleasant. Three out of four reported having a conversation about food and beverage choices in the past 6 months, but only 1 in 4 described the conversations as emotional. This indicates that, despite media coverage highlighting many controversial issues in the food and health environment, there is little debate surrounding these issues among the population at large.

Those who have had emotional conversations about food are younger on average (about 43 years old), more likely to be female, and more likely to have kids in the household. These consumers are clearly passionate about food and have put a great deal of thought into the products they buy and consume. They are more likely than other consumers to have put a lot of thought into the healthfulness, ingredients, sustainability, and safety of their foods and beverages, as well as the ways food is farmed and produced and the amount of physical activity they get. In comparison to the average consumer, this group’s purchasing decisions are heavily influenced by the healthfulness of the food and beverages, there is also more planning put into all meal occasions for these consumers.

*In the last 6 months, have you had an emotional conversation with someone about food and beverage choices?*



# Health & Diet

## Overall Health Status

Consistent with 2013, nine out of ten Americans describe their health as good or better. The majority (62%) report that their health is either excellent or very good, and only nine percent report that they are in fair or poor health.

## Weight Management

More than half of Americans (54%) report that they are trying to lose weight. Twenty-five percent indicate they are trying to maintain their weight, and 18 percent are currently not doing anything regarding their weight, up slightly from 2013 (15%).

Of those who are trying to lose or maintain weight, when asked what methods they will use for weight management, four out of five say they would eat smaller portions (81%), and three-quarters would track and increase their physical activity (77%) or eat smaller, more frequent snacks or meals (74%). Americans are also likely to try a number of other strategies, including tracking and limiting the number of calories in the foods you eat (66%), eating meals or snacks less frequently (62%), and substitute lower calorie foods for full calorie alternatives (60%). However, when asked which of these weight management strategies is the most effective, more than one out of four identified tracking and increasing the amount of time they are physically active (27%) and eating smaller portions of what they eat now (26%).

## Calories and Energy Balance

Slightly more than four out of ten Americans think about calories often or always, while a quarter of Americans think about calories rarely or never. Women, college graduates, and those self-reported being in excellent or good health are more likely to think about calories than their counterparts.

Similar to 2013, when it comes to calories, only three in ten Americans (29%) correctly believe that all sources of calories play an equal role in weight gain.

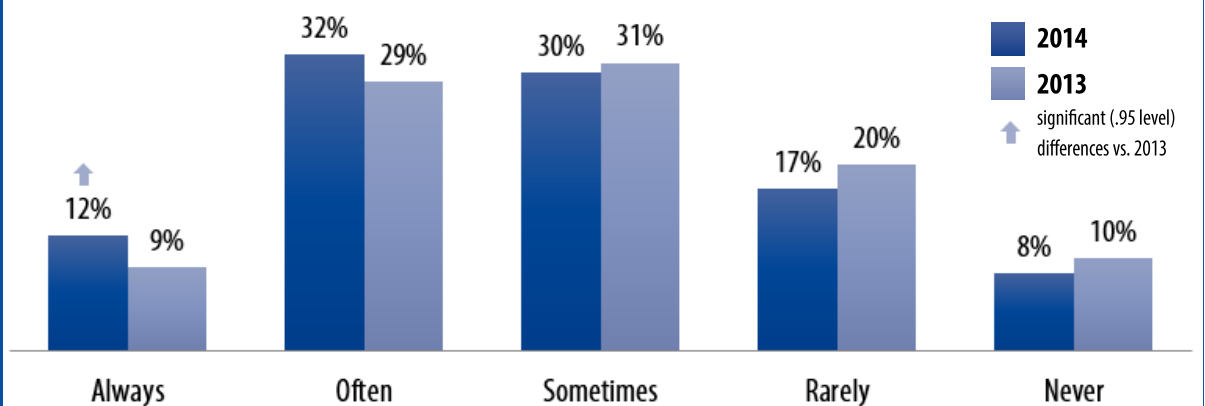


Less than a third understand that all sources of calories influence weight gain equally. Four out of ten believe that carbohydrates or sugars are the most likely to cause weight gain compared to fifteen percent for fats and only one percent for protein.

## Physical Activity

The vast majority of Americans (89%) have given at least a little thought to the amount of physical activity they get, with fewer reporting that they have given a lot of thought to their physical activity (56% in 2014 vs 60% in 2013). Nearly half report they have increased their physical activity in the past two years, citing changes in the way clothes fit (75%), change in weight (75%), and change in overall health and well-being as the top reasons for becoming more physically active (74%).

*How often do you think about the number of calories you consume?*



# Information Sources & Influences

## Information Sources and Influences

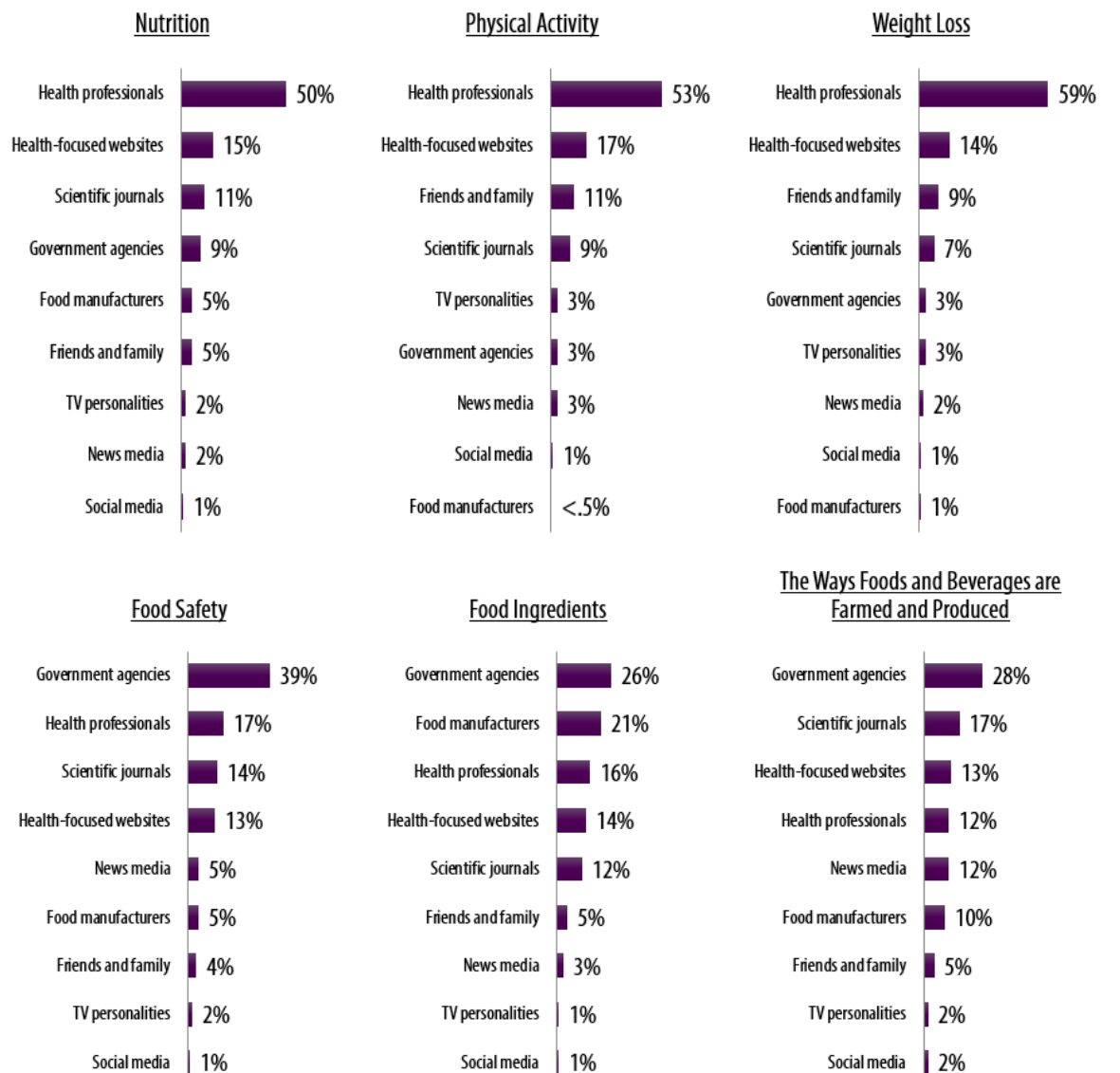
When asked what sources they would *trust the most* to provide accurate information about issues related to food and health, the majority of Americans identified health professionals as the top trusted source for nutrition (50%), physical activity (53%), and weight loss (59%). Health-focused websites followed health professionals as the second leading trusted source. Government agencies are the most trusted source for food safety (39%), food ingredients (26%) and the way foods and beverages are farmed and produced (28%). However, health professionals, health-focused websites, and scientific journals are selected by 10%-20% of Americans, indicating there is less consensus on the most trusted source for these issues.

Social media, news media, and TV personalities are among the least trusted sources for all areas of food and health. When asked whether they generally believe statements in the media about a food offering health benefits, half of consumers (50%) disagree and only three percent agree strongly.

Most Americans (58%) have seen the *MyPlate* graphic, and thirty-seven percent feel they know at least a fair amount about it. Women and college graduates are much more likely to be familiar with the *MyPlate* graphic. Thirty-eight percent say they have never seen it.



*Which one of these sources would you trust the most to provide accurate information about the following issues?*



# Information Sources & Influences

## Food Labeling

For the third consecutive year, expiration date (66%) is the most commonly used information on food and beverage packaging. However, after 76% reported using the expiration date in 2012 and 82% in 2013, it has declined back to its historical trend. The Nutrition Facts panel is the second most commonly used source of packaging information (65%). These two pieces of information continue to be the primary information consumers seek from the food package. Fewer Americans use serving size information (44% in 2014 vs 55% in 2013), brand name (35% in 2014 vs 53% in 2013), cooking instructions/preparation time (32% in 2014 vs 45% in 2013) and statements about nutrition or health benefits.

Similar to 2013, of those Americans who use the Nutrition Facts panel, nearly all of them find it helpful for the Nutrition Facts panel to show information on calories (97%), total fat (96%), sugars (95%), sodium (95%), protein (93%), fiber (92%), saturated fat (91%), total carbohydrates (91%), *trans* fat (91%), and unsaturated fat (88%).

While half of consumers generally believe statements on product labels about foods offering health benefits and forty-three percent use health claims often, only six percent agree strongly, indicating the sentiment towards health claims is mild.

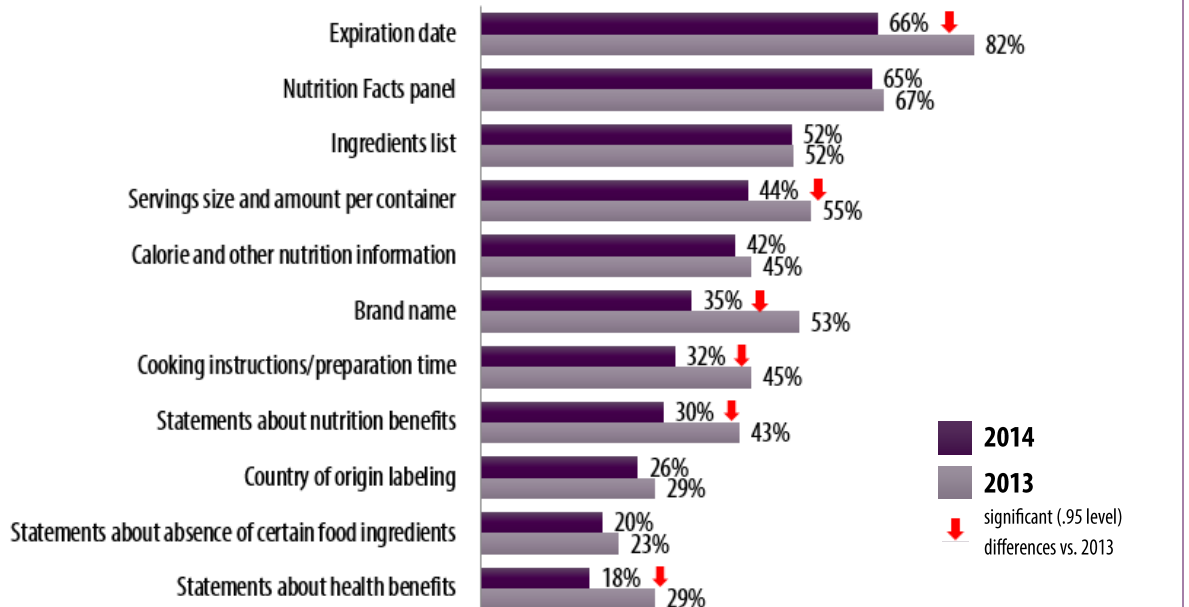
## Food Processing/Packaging

Perceptions about food processing remained consistent with 2013. Three fourths of Americans agree that food processing can help foods stay fresh



longer. A majority of Americans also believe that some processed foods can provide affordable, nutritious options (63%), food processing can help improve food safety (54%), and processed foods can contain the nutrients needed for a healthful diet (50%). When these same statements are made using the term “packaged foods” or “food packaging” instead of “processed foods” or “food processing,” consumers are much more likely to agree. For example, 88 percent of consumers agree food packaging can help foods stay fresh longer (13% greater than food processing), and 85 percent believe some packaged foods can provide affordable, nutritious options (22% greater than processed foods). Comparing food processing and food packaging in the other two statements, the difference is even greater. Eighty two percent believe food packaging can help improve food safety (28% greater than food processing), and 77 percent agree packaged foods can contain the nutrients needed for a healthful diet (27% greater than processed foods).

*What information do you look at on the food or beverage package when deciding to purchase or eat a food or beverage? (Select all that apply.)*



# Restaurant & Meal Occasions

## Meal Planning

At least three out of five Americans spend some time planning each of their meals. Nine out of ten Americans spend some time planning dinner, and 52% plan it a lot, making it overwhelmingly the most planned meal. Women and those who self-reported being in excellent or good health are more likely to plan for dinner. No more than twenty percent plan a lot for any other meal or snacks. However, most Americans do plan at least some for breakfast (65%), lunch (79%), and snacks (65%).

In order to help regularly plan what they will eat or drink, three out of five Americans make shopping lists, and half of Americans use coupons or in-store discounts. Budget and meals plans are somewhat less popular (38% and 24%, respectively). With about one out of ten reporting, the least popular method for planning meals is using a mobile application. However, Millennials ages 18-34 years old are more likely than all other age groups to use mobile applications.

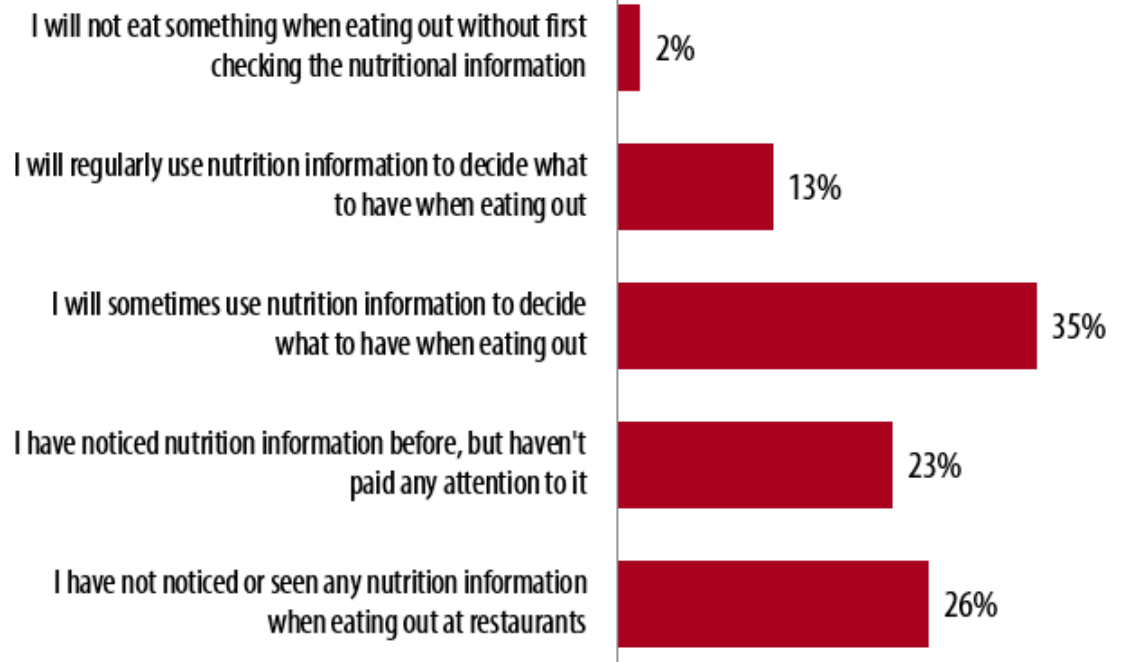
## Menu Labeling

Regarding nutrition labeling when eating out at restaurants, half of Americans at least sometimes use nutrition information to decide what to



have. However, twenty three percent do not pay attention to nutrition information when eating out, and one out of four (26%) have not noticed or seen any nutrition information when eating out. Those who pay attention to nutrition information when eating out are more likely to be married, female, and more highly educated. They are also more likely to be trying to lose weight (64%, vs. 44% who do not use nutrition information when eating out).

*How, if at all, have you used nutrition information (like calorie counts) when eating out at restaurants?*



# Dietary Components

## Food Ingredients

Nearly nine out of ten Americans have given some thought to the ingredients in their foods and beverages in the past year, with two out of five giving a lot of thought to the ingredients. Consumers impacted by healthfulness and sustainability are more likely to have given a lot of thought to ingredients. Additionally, the vast majority of Americans (86%) believe they would be able to find information about ingredients in their food if there was something they wanted to know. More than four out of five (85%) Americans have not heard the term generally recognized as safe (GRAS).

## Protein

Most Americans agree that it's important to consume enough protein in their diet (91%), and that protein can help build muscle (87%). Approximately three-quarters believe that protein is part of a balanced diet (78%), it can enhance recovery from exercise (76%), and it helps people feel full (72%).

Half of Americans are reportedly trying to get at least a certain amount of protein in their diet (50%), a significant decrease from 2013 (57%). Among those who are trying to consume protein, more than four out of five get protein from poultry, eggs, nuts & seeds, and fish. A little more than 70% reported beans and legumes, milk and dairy, and beef are protein sources they try to consume. The least likely source of protein is soy, with only one in four reporting it as a source. In terms of specific products they may purchase,

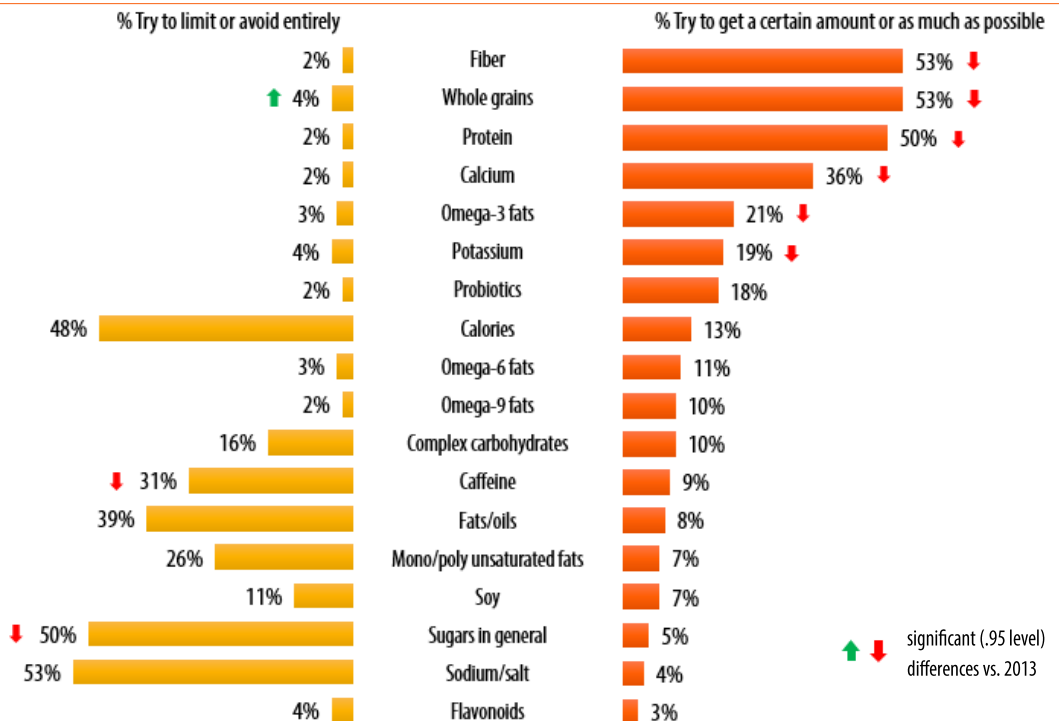
seven out of ten report consuming peanut butter and other nut butters to get protein.

This year, barriers to increasing protein consumption were explored. The most common reasons for not consuming more protein include already getting enough protein (44%) and foods with protein are more expensive (38%). One fourth of Americans do not consume more protein because they believe higher protein foods have a lot of unhealthful components. Fewer consumers cite uncertainty about how to prepare foods with protein and difficulty incorporating protein into meals as barriers to consuming more protein (17% and 16%, respectively).

## Dietary Fats

More than half of Americans are thinking about whether their foods contain fats or oils, saturated fats, and trans fats, and two-thirds Americans claim they try to eat as little fat as possible (67%). Three out of five Americans are considering the fat content of foods to help maintain a healthy weight, prevent future health problems, and help reduce the risk of heart disease. However, one in five do try to consume foods or beverages that contain omega-3 fats, a significant decrease from last year (21% in 2014 vs 25% in 2013).

*To what extent do you try to consume or avoid the following?*





# Dietary Components

Most Americans (75%) recognize that not all types of fat have the same impact on health. However, there is apparently some confusion regarding which types of fats to avoid. While almost half are trying to limit or avoid *trans* fats or saturated fats (49% and 47%, respectively), twenty-six percent report also limiting or avoiding mono- and poly-unsaturated fats, which are the more healthful fatty acids. Additionally, fewer Americans are able to correctly identify sources of unsaturated fats, such as nuts (42% in 2014 vs 50% in 2013), avocados (39% in 2014 vs 46% in 2013) and olive oil (38% in 2014 vs 45% in 2013).

## Sodium

Just over half of Americans (53%) are trying to limit or avoid sodium entirely, and of those that use the Nutrition Facts Panel to make food and beverage purchasing decisions, 95% find sodium information helpful.

The majority of Americans believe that many diet and lifestyle factors can have a positive impact on blood pressure management. At least 90 percent believe the following changes would reduce blood pressure or prevent it from going higher: getting regular physical activity; losing weight; reducing or managing stress; eating a diet rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains and low-fat dairy; and reducing salt/sodium in the diet. At least eight out of ten also agree limiting or stopping smoking, limiting or stopping drinking alcohol, and using spices or herbs instead of salt in foods may also have a positive impact.

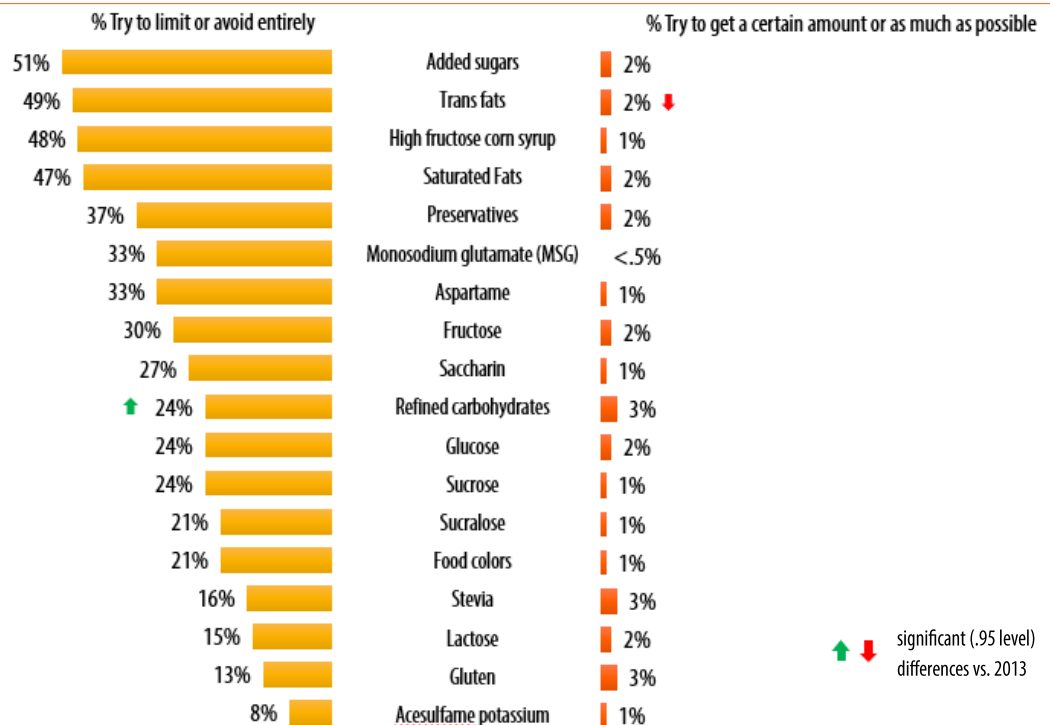
While two thirds of Americans recognize the functional role sodium plays in foods and beverages as a preservative and flavor enhancer, much fewer know it can also help prevent harmful bacteria in foods (41%), and improve the texture and firmness of foods (38%).

## Carbohydrates & Sugars

Compared to 2013, fewer Americans report trying to limit or avoid sugars in general when making packaged food or beverage decisions over the past twelve months (50% in 2014 vs 58% in 2013). Similarly, half of consumers (51%) are also trying to limit or avoid added sugars. In terms of assessing their own sugars intake, half of all Americans believe they are consuming pretty close to an appropriate amount of sugars. One in three says they consume more than the appropriate amount of sugars.

Regarding specific sugars, consumers are more likely to be trying to limit or avoid high fructose corn syrup (48%) or fructose (30%) compared to glucose (24%), sucrose (24%), or lactose (15%). The majority of Americans say they don't pay attention to complex or refined carbohydrates (58% for both) when making packaged food or beverage decisions. Three out of five Americans consider sugars content in their foods and beverages to prevent health conditions and maintain a healthy weight. The least mentioned reason for considering sugars content is to help foods taste better.

*To what extent do you try to consume or avoid the following?*



# Dietary Components

Three-quarters (74%) of Americans believe that moderate amounts of sugars can be part of a healthful diet, compared to 84 percent in 2013. Two out of three think that sugars found naturally in foods and drinks are more healthful than other sugars. Significantly fewer Americans agree that people with diabetes can include some foods with sugar as part of their total diet (54% in 2014 vs 71% in 2013). A little more than half of Americans believe that it is not necessary to completely eliminate sugar from their diet in order to lose weight (53%).

## Low-Calorie Sweeteners

Aspartame is the low-calorie sweetener Americans are considering most when making food and beverage purchasing decisions, followed by saccharin and sucralose. In terms of actions, no more than one-third of consumers are trying to limit or avoid any specific low-calorie sweetener. Thirty-three percent are trying to limit or avoid aspartame, followed by saccharin (27%), sucralose (21%), and stevia (16%). Only eight percent report trying to limit or avoid acesulfame potassium.

## Caffeine

Compared to 2013, significantly fewer Americans are considering and trying to limit or avoid caffeine in their foods and beverages. Forty-five percent are considering the caffeine content (compared to 55% in 2013), and thirty-one percent are trying to limit or avoid it (compared to 37% in 2013).

The survey also explored knowledge gaps around caffeine. While most consumers believe they know the amount of caffeine in the foods and

beverages they consume, less than one in five Americans (18%) think that an 8-ounce cup of coffee has the same amount of caffeine as an energy drink, when in fact their caffeine content is comparable.

## Functional Foods

Fiber and whole grains continue to be the top nutrients Americans are seeking to consume in their diets. However, both declined significantly from 62% in 2013 to 53% in 2014. Compared to fiber and whole grains, fewer consumers are trying to at least get a certain amount of calcium (36%), omega-3s (21%), and probiotics (18%).

Americans recognize health benefits associated with whole grains; however, very few are aware of health benefits associated with soy and flavonoids. More than two thirds of Americans are able to correctly identify benefits of whole grains related to maintenance of a healthy digestive system (80%), promotion of heart health (78%), weight management (70%), and satiety (67%). Sixty percent are also aware of the relationship between whole grains and promotion of healthy blood sugar levels. Only one out of three Americans recognize the association between soy and heart health, and even fewer associate flavonoids with heart health (11%). Just as many consumers attribute other health benefits to soy and flavonoids that are not currently supported by science.

Some consumers find it difficult to believe foods have benefits beyond basic nutrition because they do not feel the science has proven these benefits (52%) and they do not see immediate results (33%).



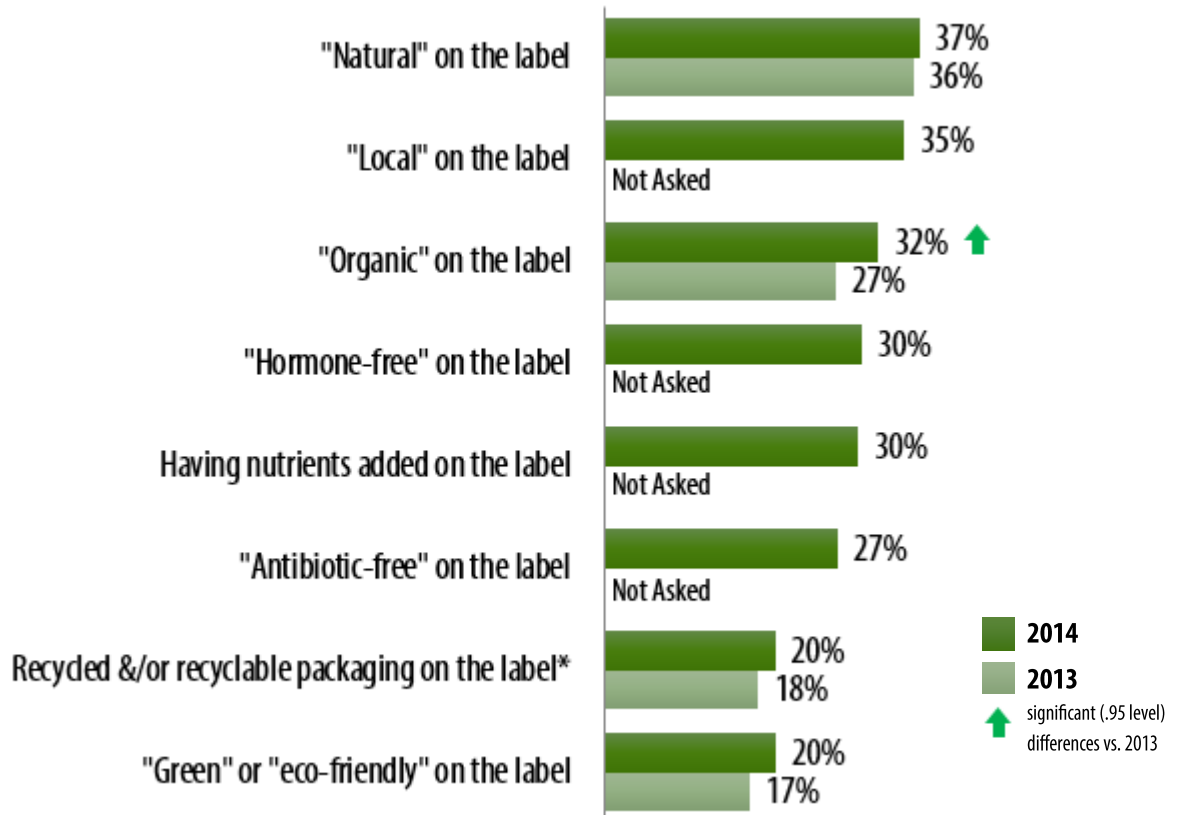
# Sustainability

## Sustainability

Seven out of ten Americans (71%) have given at least a little thought to the production of their foods and beverages. Additionally, three out of five Americans (62%) report that they have given at least some thought to whether foods and beverages they purchase or consume are produced in an environmentally sustainable way. More than a quarter are not giving any thought to the way the foods and beverages they consume are farmed or produced. When asked what actions they do on a regular basis, 37 percent say they purchase foods and beverages because they are advertised as "natural" on the label. "Local" and "organic" are also terms approximately one third of consumers look for on the label. Only one out of five report regularly buying foods or beverages because they are in recycled and/or recyclable packaging or advertised as "green" or "eco-friendly" on the label.



*Which of the following, if any, do you do on a regular basis (that is, most times when you shop for food and beverages)?*



# Food Safety

## Food Safety

Although Americans continue to remain confident in the safety of the U.S. food supply, confidence declined for a second consecutive year to 66%. Almost four out of ten Americans report that they have given food and beverage safety a lot of thought, and 82 percent have given at least a little. Women, college graduates, and consumers impacted by healthfulness and taste are most likely to think about food safety a lot. Significantly more Americans are not thinking at all about food safety (16%) compared to 2013.

Nearly two out of five Americans have changed the foods they eat in the past year as a result of food safety information. When asked the most important food safety issue considered when shopping for food, a third of Americans say getting sick from something they eat is most top of mind, followed by chemicals in food and packaging (23%), pesticide residues in fruits and vegetables (16%), unfamiliar ingredients that I don't recognize (8%), and undeclared food allergens (3%). Twelve percent are not concerned about any food safety issues.

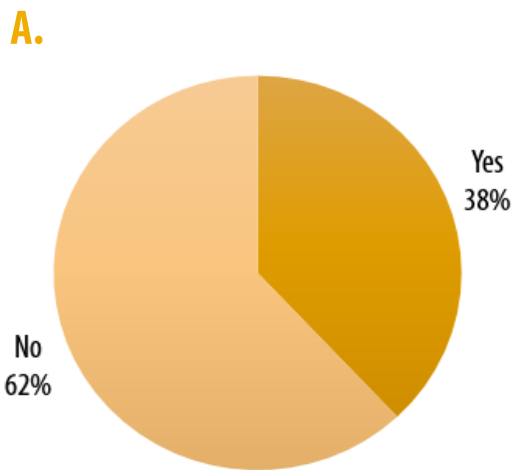
This year, consumers were asked about the overall food system and the roles various stakeholders play in ensuring food safety. More than four out of five Americans believe that the brands they buy are safe. Two thirds of Americans also indicate food recalls affect the products they buy. In terms of ensuring safety of the food supply, 69 percent believe FDA is doing an effective job, and 61 percent believe food manufacturers are taking appropriate safety measures. Three out of four indicate conflicting information on food safety makes it hard to know what is safe, and 72 percent say uncertainty about



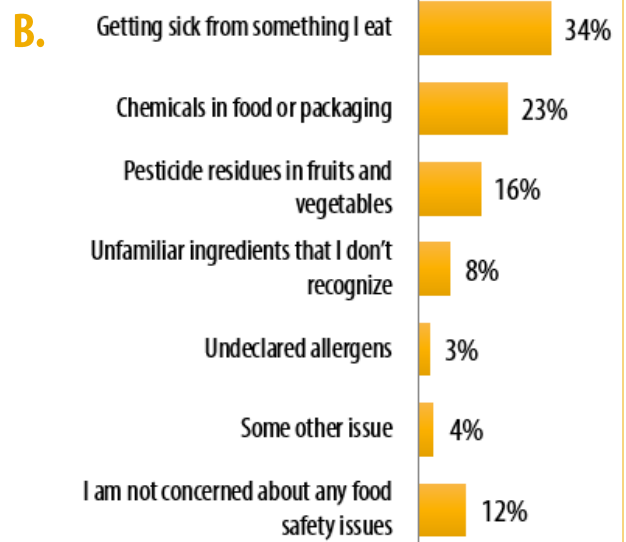
food production makes them more concerned about safety. Additionally, six out of ten do not know what sources to trust for food safety information.

Americans are much more aware of *Salmonella* (95%) as a problem in food compared to *Campylobacter* (5%). Just as many consumers believe that food containing *Salmonella* bacteria can be made safe by cooking it as those who believe it cannot be made safe to eat at all (both 42%). Nine out of ten Americans indicate raw chicken is likely to contain *Salmonella* germs that can cause illness, followed by raw eggs (79%), raw pork (73%), raw beef (64%), and raw produce (52%).

A. Have you changed any of the foods you eat in the past year as a result of information you heard or read about food safety?



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



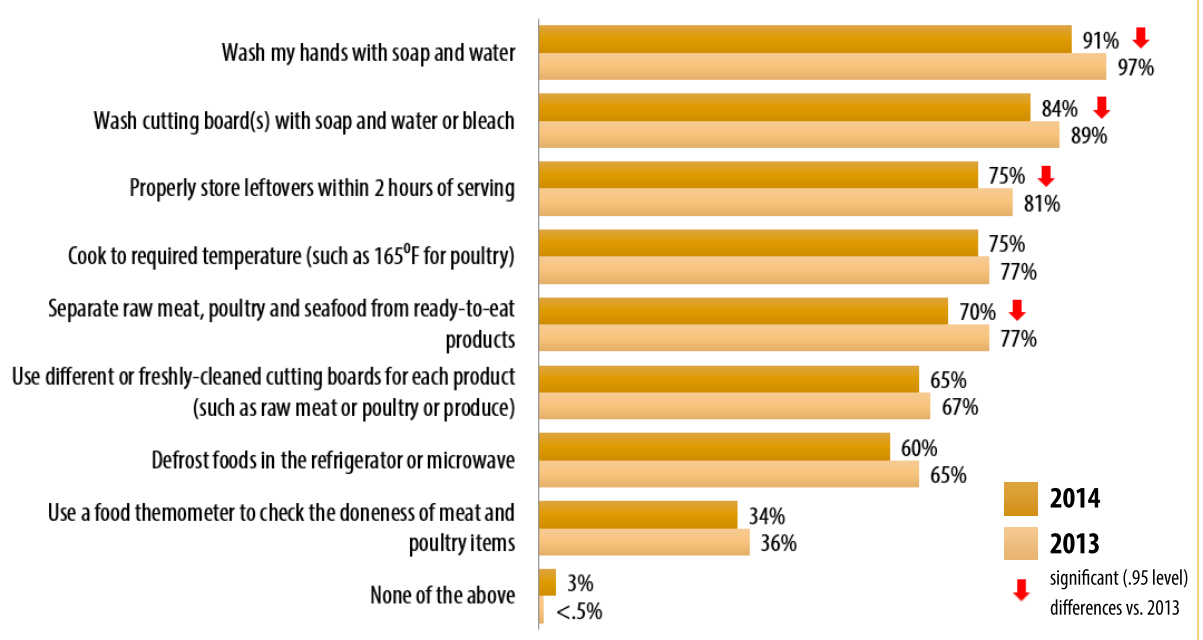
# Food Safety

Among the variety of actions Americans are taking to achieve food safety—washing their hands and cutting boards are the most common practices for the second consecutive year (91% and 84% respectively). The majority are also regularly storing leftovers properly within two hours of serving the food (75%), cooking foods to the required temperature (75%), and separating raw meat, poultry and seafood from ready-to-eat or raw foods (70%). Few Americans are using a food thermometer to check the doneness of meat and poultry items (34%). Among those not currently using a food thermometer, half report they would be encouraged to use one if it was given to them for free. Listing temperatures in recipe directions would also prompt many to increase their food thermometer use.

## Imported Foods

Consistent with 2013, more than half of Americans believe that imported foods are less safe than foods produced or grown in the US, while 24 percent of Americans believe imported foods are as safe, and only three percent believe they are safer. When asked why imported foods are less than those produced or grown in the US, the top reason was there are fewer regulations and inspections than required in the US (84%).

*Which of the following actions do you perform regularly when cooking, preparing, and consuming food products? (Select all that apply.)*



# Appendix

## Full Report

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

## 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, Dooher 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, Dooher 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

### **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.

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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