International Food Information Council

Knowledge, Understanding and Use of Front-of-Package Labeling in Food and Beverage Decisions: Insights from U.S. Shoppers

November 2021

Methodology

Online survey of 1,002 Americans ages 18 to 80. Fielding took place between June 24 to July 8, 2021.

The survey took approximately 13 minutes to complete on average.

The results were weighted to ensure that they are reflective of the American population ages 18 to 80, as seen in the 2020 Current Population Survey. Specifically, they were weighted by age, education, gender, race/ethnicity and region.

The survey was conducted using Dynata's consumer panel.

Suggested citation: International Food Information Council. *Knowledge, Understanding and Use of Front-of-Pack Labeling in Food and Beverage Decisions: Insights from U.S. Shoppers.* 16 November 2021. <https://foodinsight.org/ific-survey-fop-labeling/>

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Key Takeaways

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Half of consumers say front-of-package nutritional labels impact their purchasing decisions.

Overall, 54% of Americans report that front-of-package (FOP) labels impact their food and beverage purchases, and a quarter consider the impact significant. The impact of FOP labels trails slightly behind portion size, the Nutrition Facts label and the ingredient list.

Those most impacted by FOP labels are younger adults, those with a higher household income, parents of children under 18 and those that are in better overall health. The age divide is perhaps most dramatic – 61% of those 18-34 and 66% of those 35-49 are impacted by FOP labels, while the same is true for only 42% of consumers age 50+.

A majority say they are more likely to review FOP labels when considering a new or unfamiliar product.

Consumers are more likely to scan packages for nutritional FOP labels and claims when considering a new product and skip the process when it comes to repeat purchases. In fact, 57% of all consumers and 64% of those who are in better health agree with this idea.

Certain food and beverage categories, such as juices, dairy, cereals and snacks garner more review of nutritional FOP labels.

Of 14 different types of food and beverage categories asked about in the survey, most consumers report always or often reviewing FOP labels on 4: 100% fruit and vegetable juice (55%), dairy (53%), cereals (52%), and savory or salty snacks (50%). Meanwhile, this attention is less common when it comes to sweet treats and other sweetened products.

Certifications from third-parties are widely recognized and trusted, but not easily understood.

Third-party certifications are the 2nd most recognized type of FOP label (74%, just behind Nutrition Facts highlights at 82%), the 3rd most considered label (34% always/often), and the 2nd most trusted (37% trust a great deal). Clearly these endorsements are impactful, especially when they come from organizations that are well-known and considered reputable. Despite this impact, third-party certification labels rank 2nd to last in terms of their understandability.

Two-thirds believe today's products have the right amount of nutritional FOP labeling.

67% think today's food and beverage products have the right amount of nutritional FOP labels and claims, while 16% would like more and 16% would like less. Similarly, only 41% consider the amount of information on packaging to be overwhelming.

Health-focused organizations and the U.S. government are most trusted on nutrition labels, but many also trust food companies.

92% of consumers would at least somewhat trust a claim or label that was endorsed by a health-focused organization (such as the American Diabetes Association or the American Heart Association) and 90% say the same about a claim endorsed by the U.S. government.

Not surprisingly, there is less trust in claims that come from a food company itself, but even these claims carry a great deal of trust: 81% say they would trust these claims at least somewhat.

Detailed Findings

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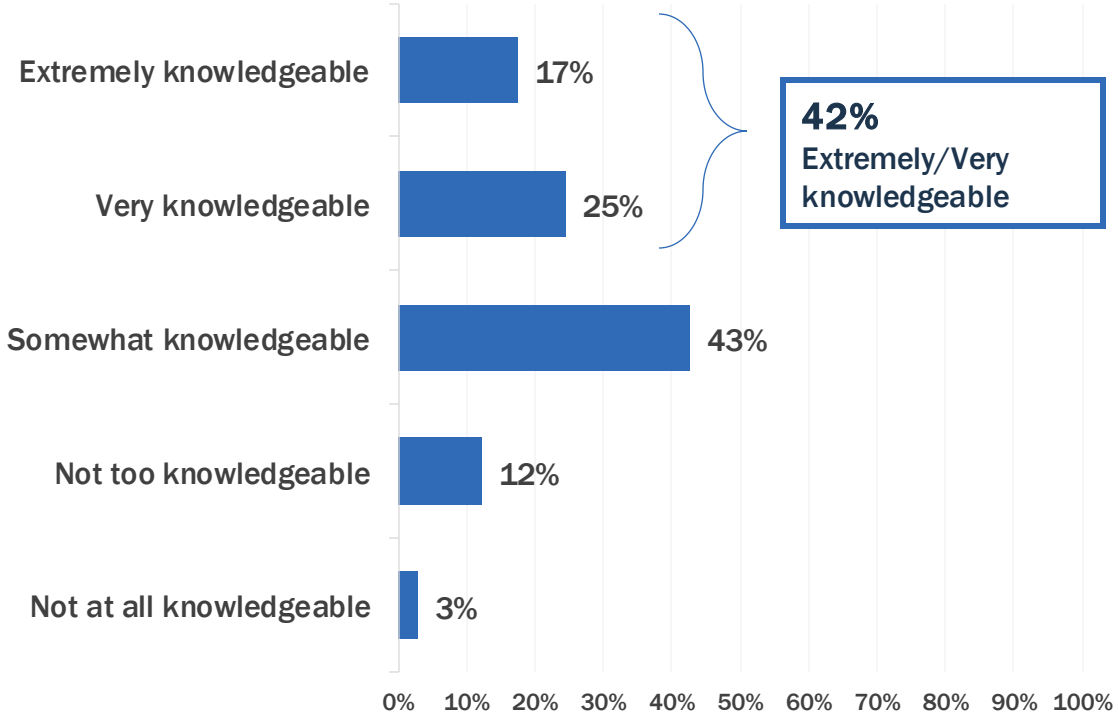
Consumer Attention to Nutrition and Diet

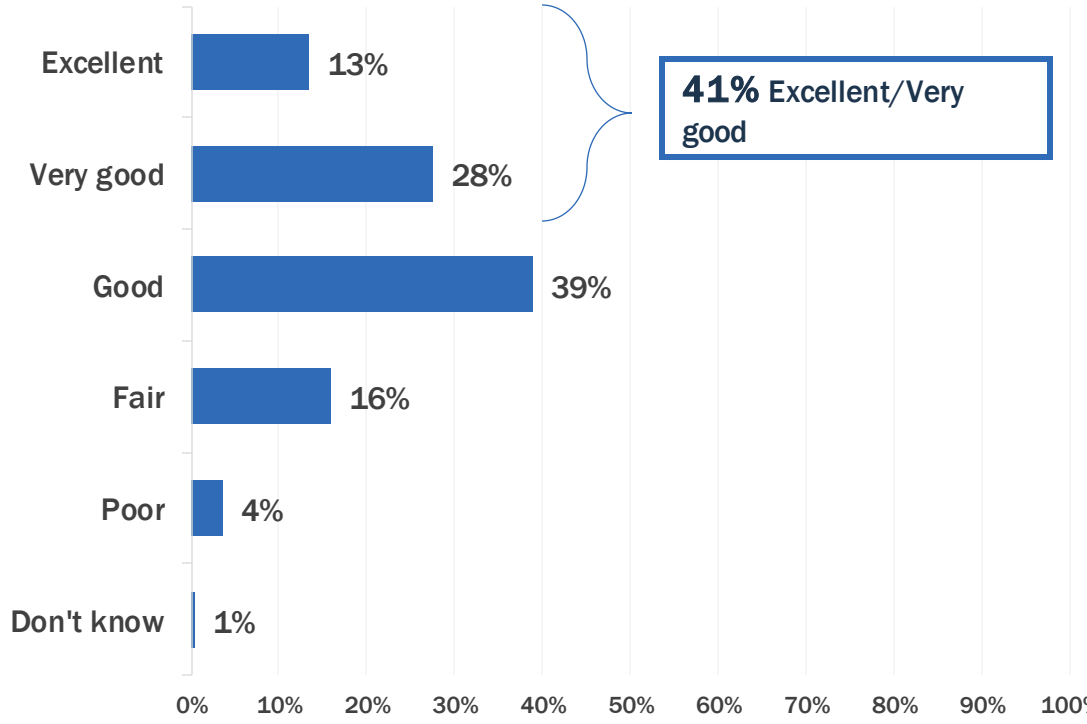
4 in 10 Consider Themselves Knowledgeable About Nutrition

Another 4 in 10 rate the healthfulness of their diet as excellent or very good. Consumers under 50 and parents with children under 18 are more likely to consider themselves knowledgeable about nutrition and rate the healthfulness of their diet higher.

Nutrition Knowledge Level



Overall Healthfulness of Diet

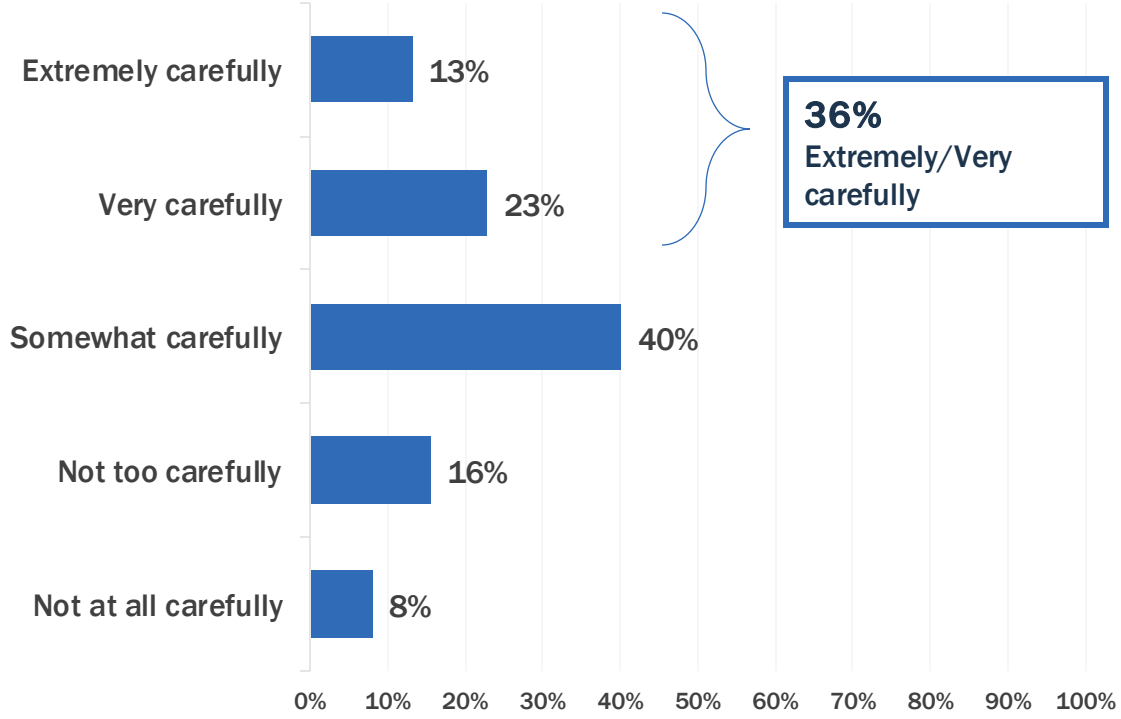


Q11. How knowledgeable are you about nutrition? Total, n=1002
Q12. In general, how healthy is your overall diet? Total, n=1002

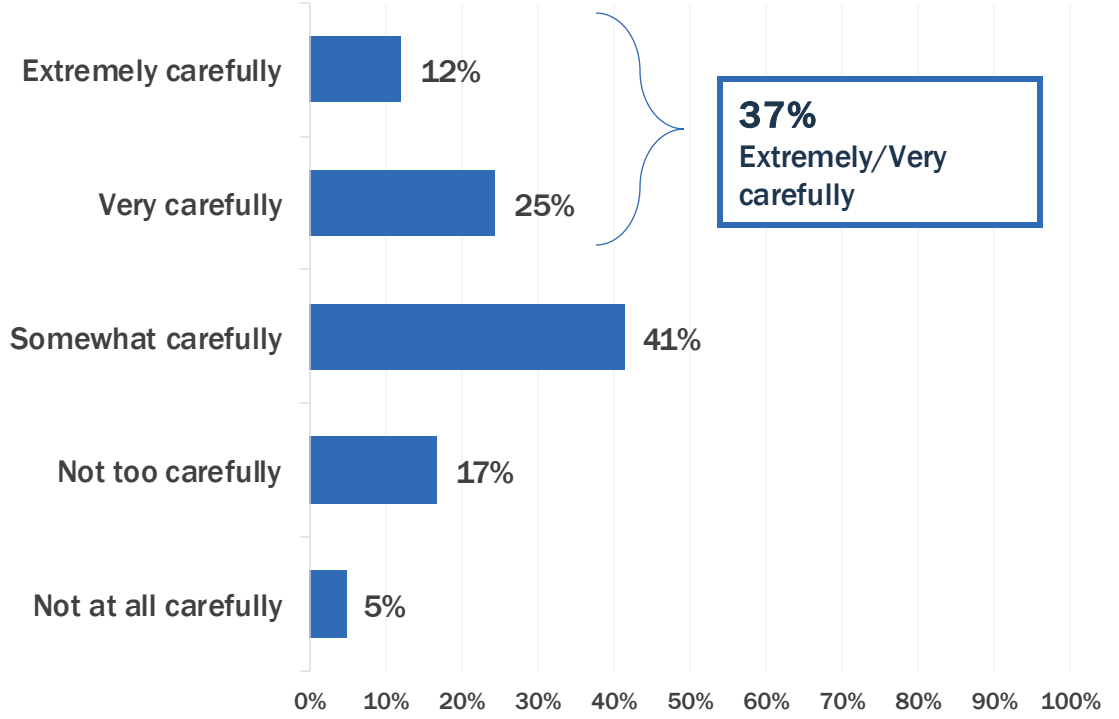
One-Third Carefully Monitor Nutritional Information and Their Diet

Consumers under 50 and parents with children under 18 are more likely to take both of these steps

Carefulness of Nutritional Information Review



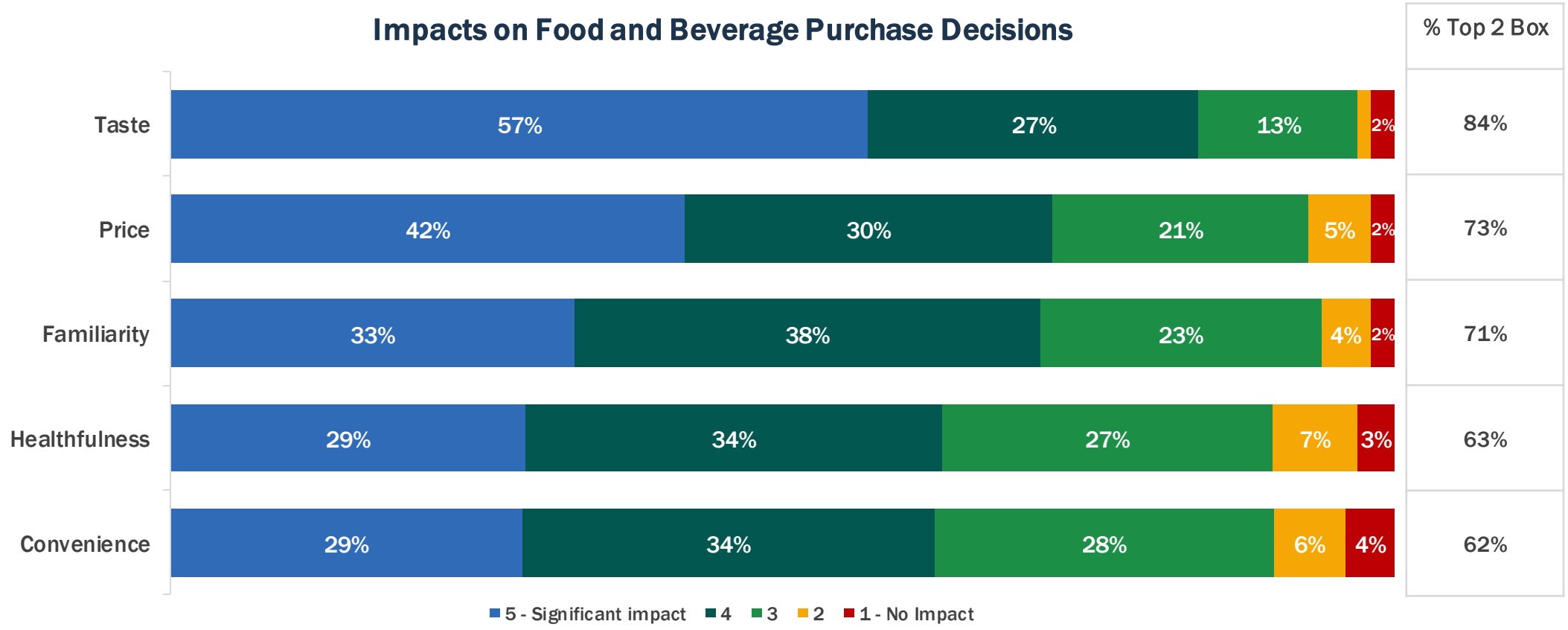
Carefulness of Monitoring Own Diet



Q14. In general, how carefully do you review the nutritional information on food and beverage products when shopping? Total, n=1002
Q13. In general, how carefully do you monitor the healthfulness of your own diet? Total, n=1002

6 in 10 Consider Healthfulness Impactful on Purchasing Decisions

While taste leads the way for consumers in general, those whose purchases are significantly influenced by FOP labels say the influence of taste and healthfulness are equal (both 93%).



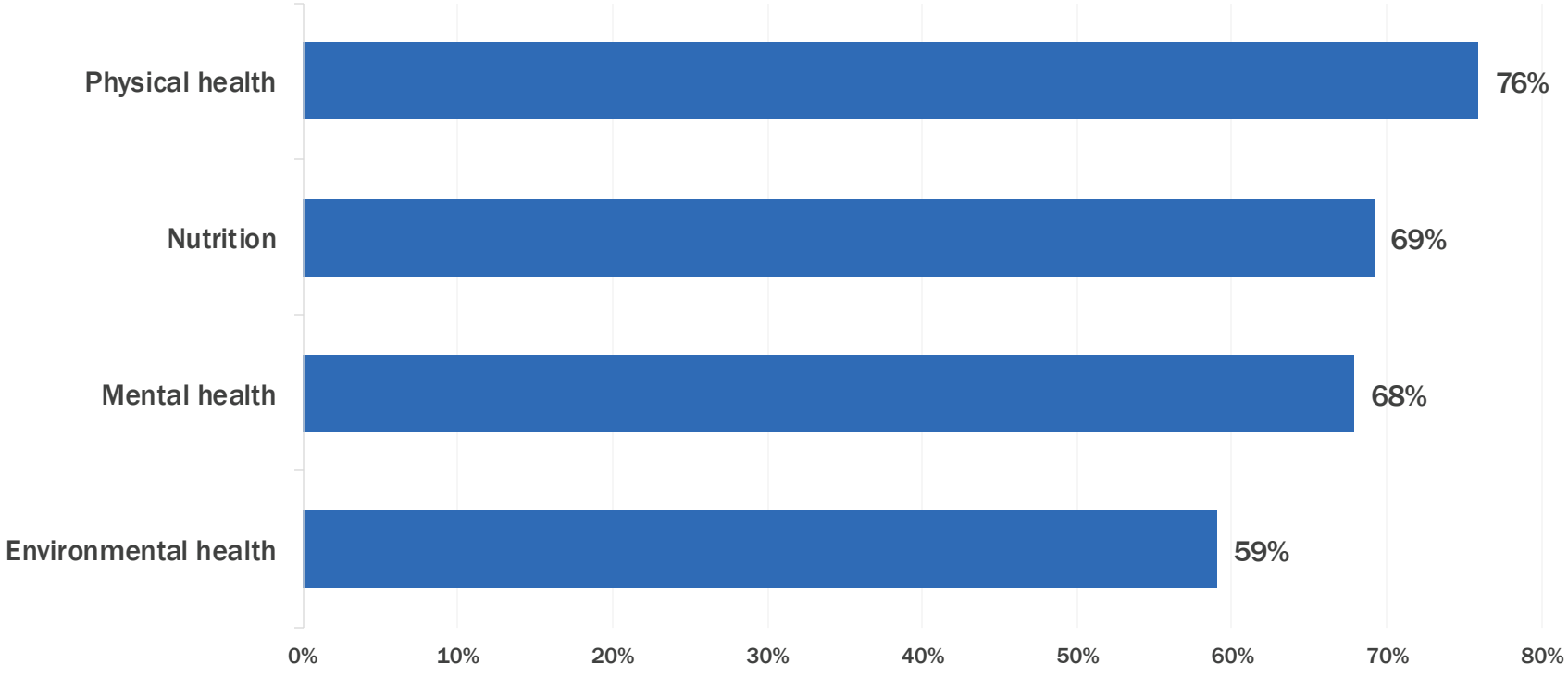
Q16. How much of an impact do the following have on your decision to buy foods and beverages? Total, n=1002

3 in 4 Are Interested in Physical Health

Nutrition and mental health trail physical health, but still rate as highly interesting for 7 in 10. Interest areas vary by age, with consumers under age 50 more interested in mental and environmental health.

Interest in Health-Related Topics

(% Top 2 Box – Very/Somewhat Interested)



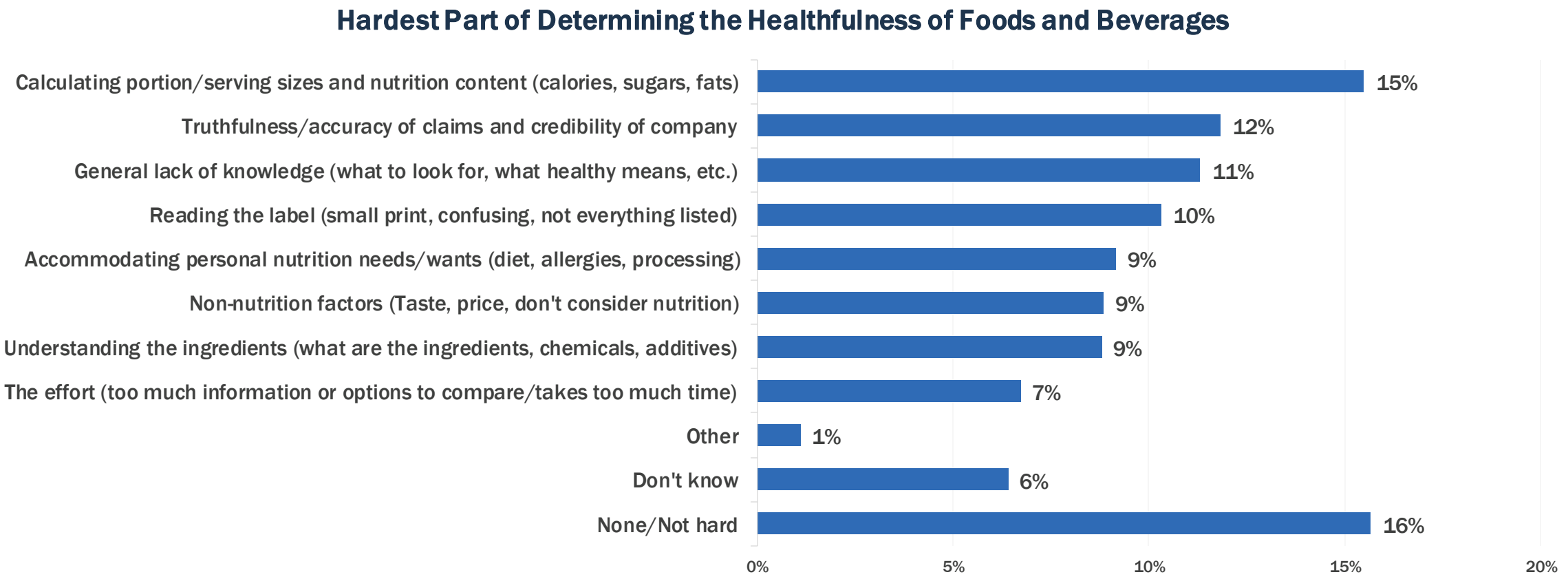
% Top 2 Box by Age

	18 to 34	35 to 49	50 to 64	65 to 80
Physical health	77%	75%	72%	82%
Nutrition	70%	72%	66%	68%
Mental health	78%	72%	59%	59%
Environmental health	66%	65%	49%	53%

Q33. How interested are you in the following topics? Total, n=1002

1 in 6 Say Calculating Portion/Serving Sizes and Nutrition Content Is Hardest

However, similar shares also say it is not hard to determine the healthfulness of food and beverage products.



Q37. In your own words, what is the hardest part about determining the healthfulness of a food/beverage product? Open-ended Question. Total, n=1002

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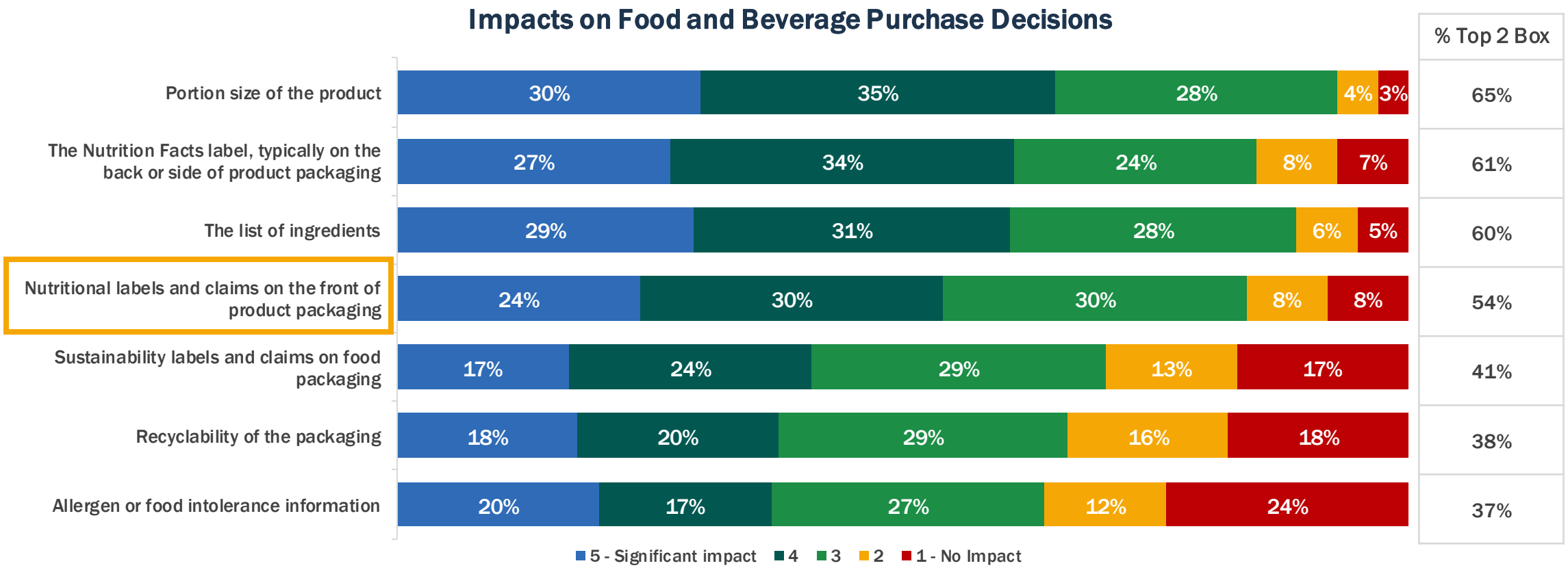
The Impact of FOP Labels

Half Find FOP Labels Impactful on Their Purchases

Portion size, the Nutrition Facts label, and the list of ingredients rank slightly ahead.



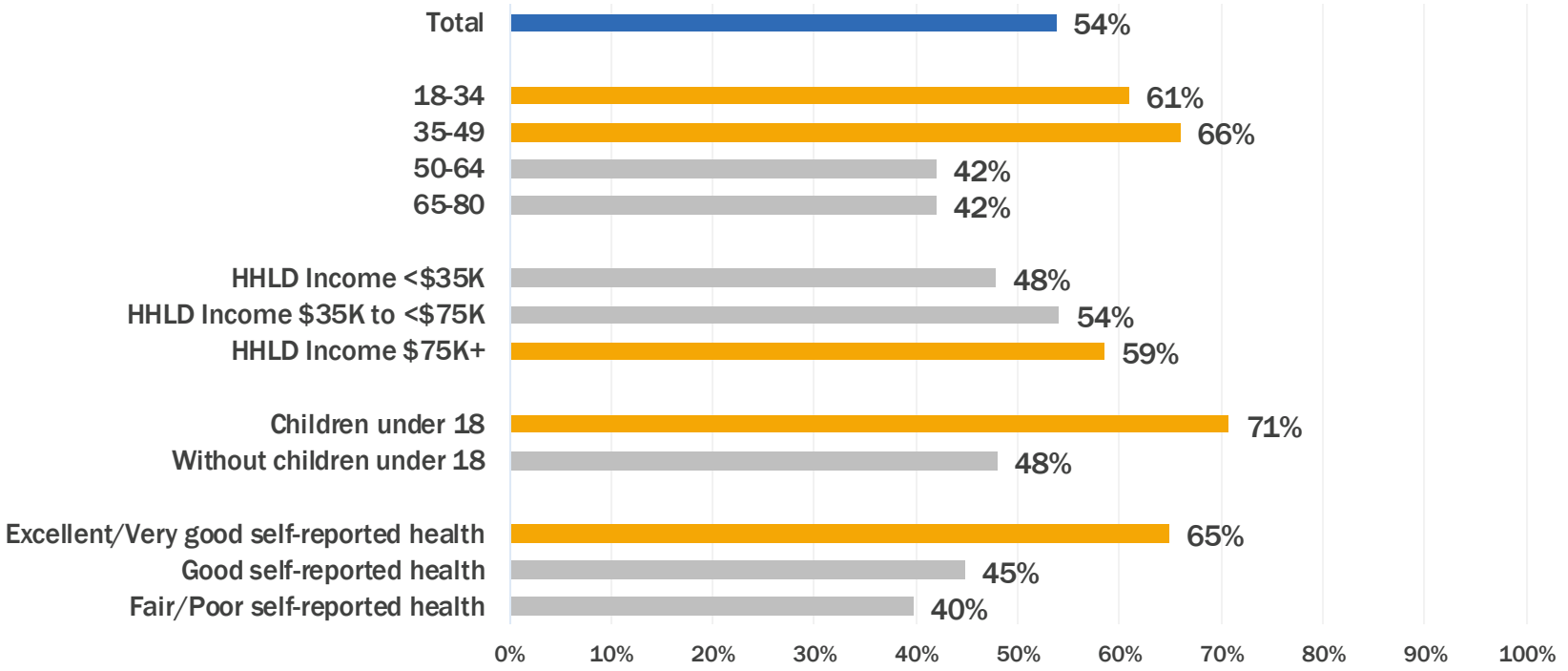
Q17. How much of an impact do the following have on your decision to buy foods and beverages? Total, n=1002

The Impact of FOP Labels Varies by Demographic

People under age 50, those with higher incomes and parents with children under 18 are more likely to consider FOP claims impactful.

Impact of "Nutritional Labels and Claims on the Front of Product Packaging" by Subgroup

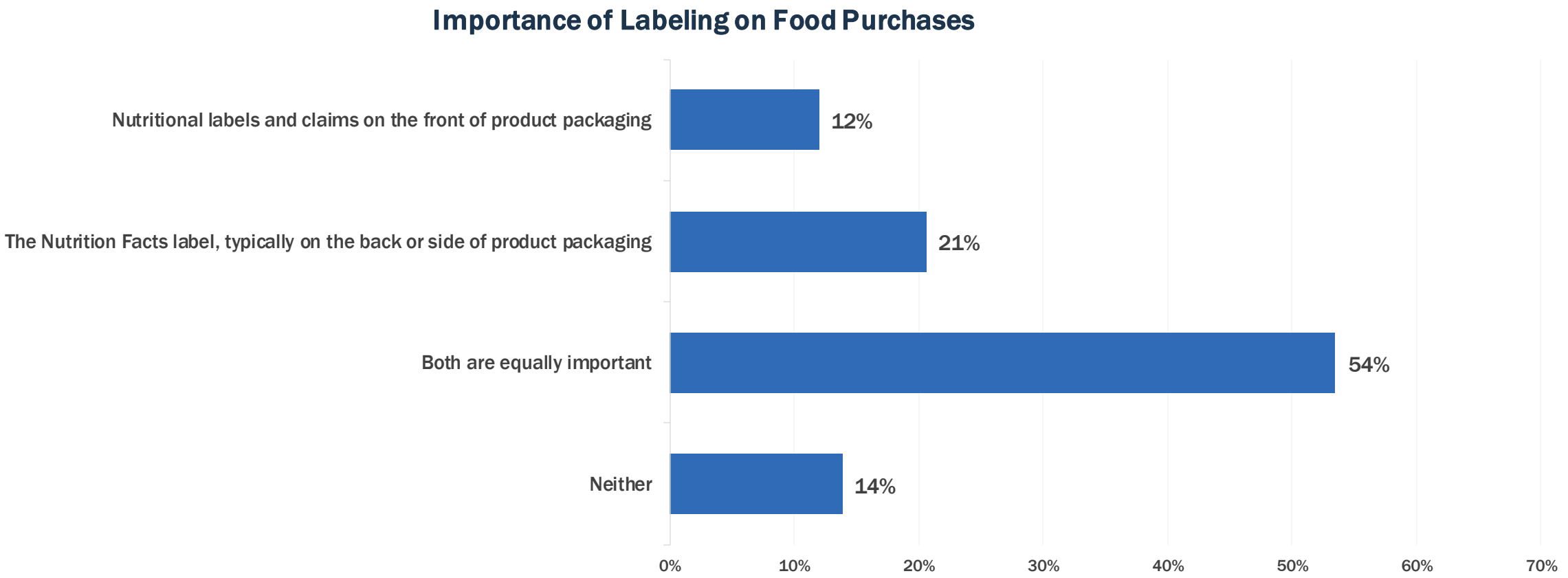
(% Top 2 Box)



Q17. How much of an impact do the following have on your decision to buy foods and beverages? Total, n=1002

Both Front- and Back-of-Package Labels Are Important

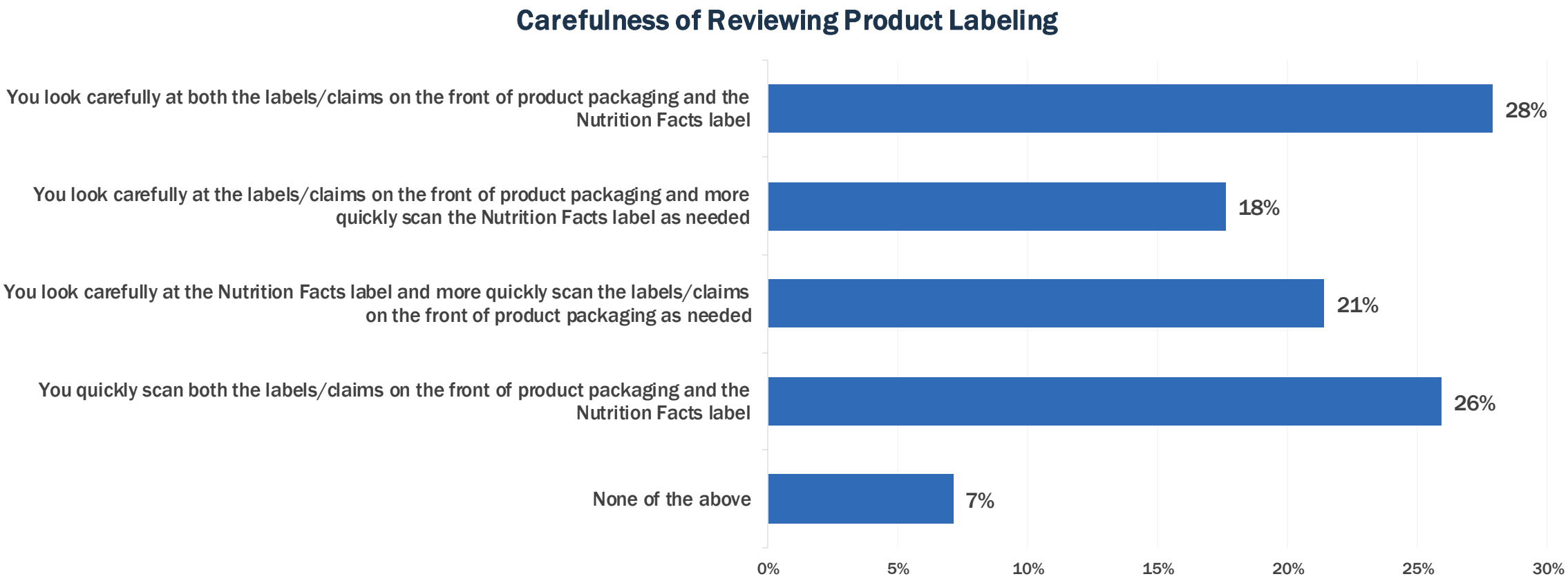
However, of those who have a preference, the labeling found on the back of packaging is nearly twice as impactful as the labeling on the front of product packaging.



Q18. When shopping for food and beverage products, which information on the packaging has the biggest impact on your purchases? *If front of package labels and Nutrition Facts panel are equal in impact*, n=586

Consumers Are Split on Their Approach to Reviewing Labels

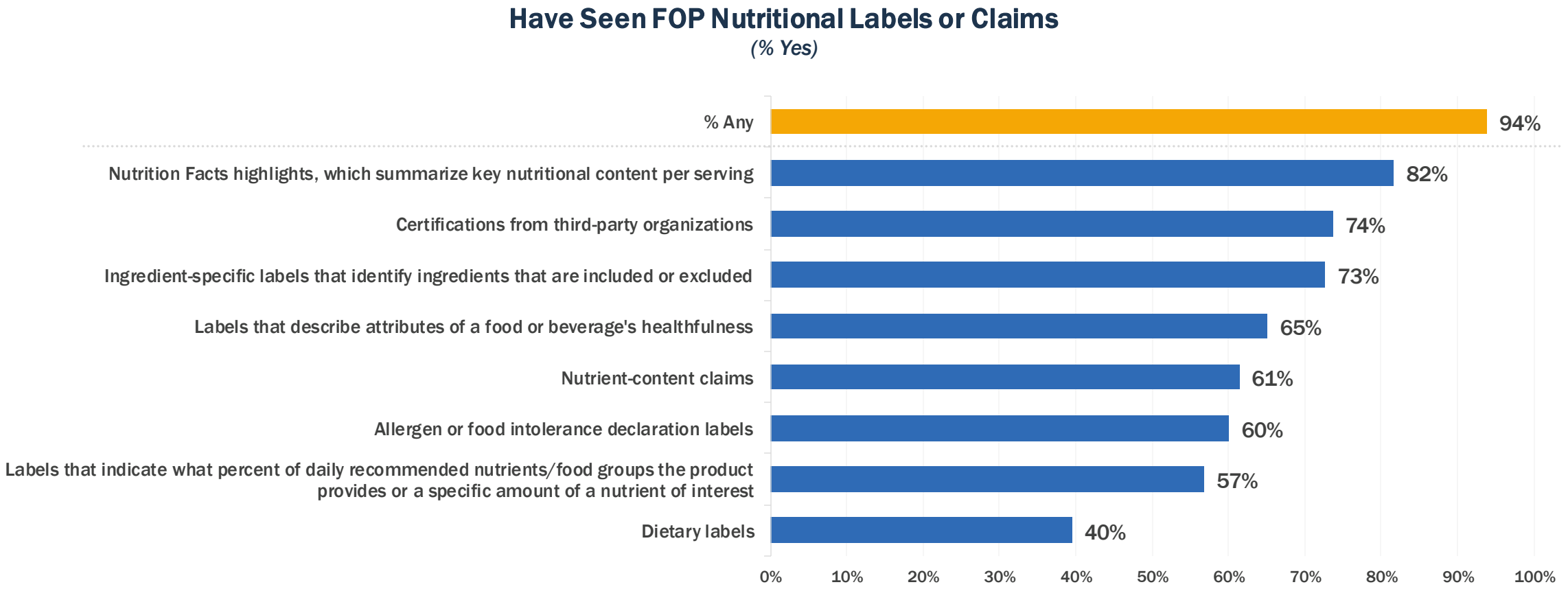
Similar shares review labels carefully as those who quickly scan labels.



Q19. Which of the following best describes how you use the two? *If FOP and NF are at least a "3" in terms of impact*, n=794

Familiarity With Nutritional FOP Labels Is High

The most familiar label is the Nutrition Facts highlights, which over 8 in 10 report having seen before.

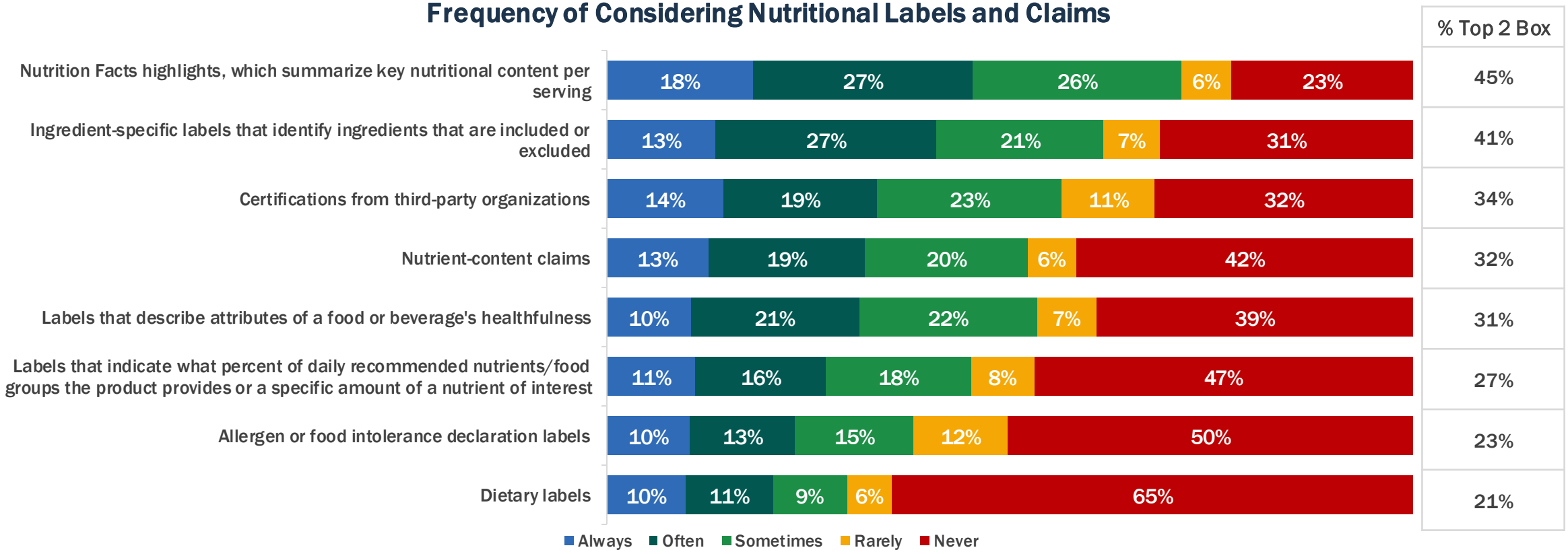


Q15. Have you ever seen any of the following nutritional labels or claims on the front of food and beverage product packaging? Total, n=1002
Note: Examples and images of each type of label were included in survey

Nutrition Facts Highlights and Ingredient-Specific FOP Labels Are Most Used

Certifications from third-party organizations are often or always considered by a third of consumers (34%). 76% of consumers under age 50 rate at least one option Always/Often (vs. 57% of consumers ages 50+).

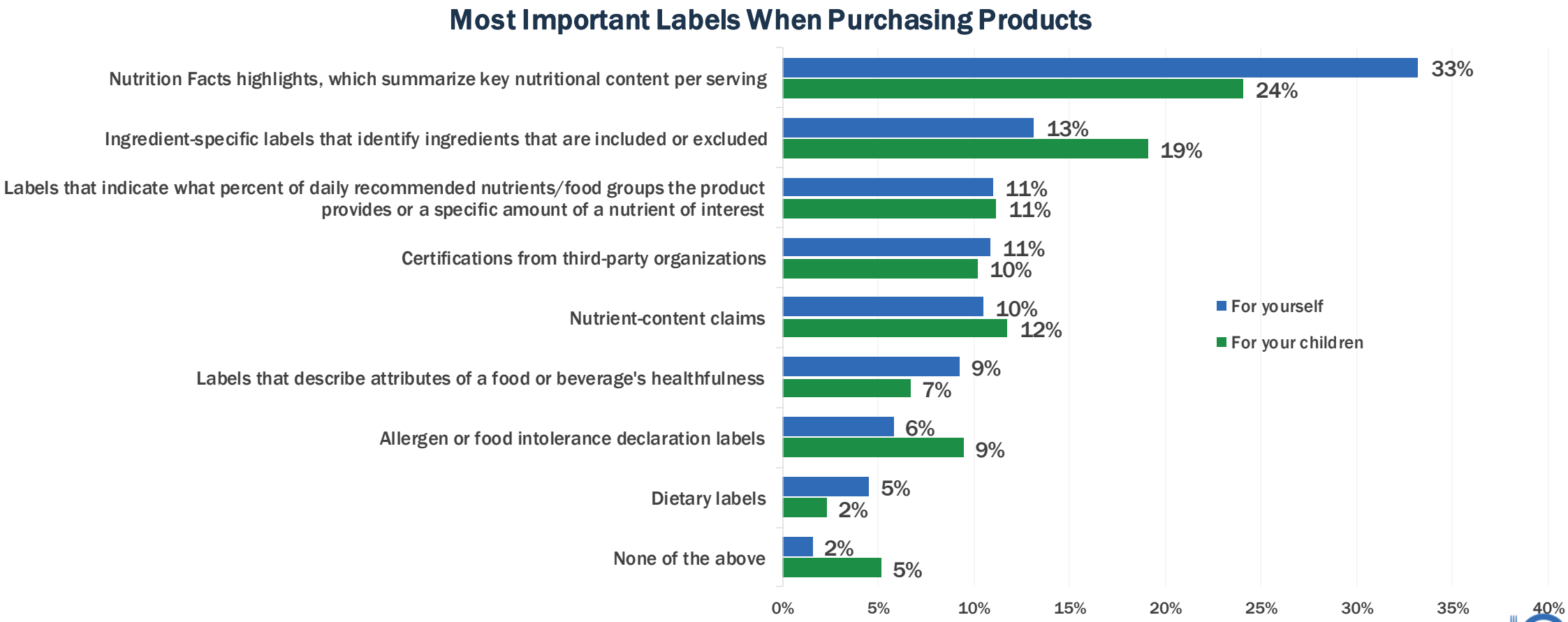
Frequency of Considering Nutritional Labels and Claims



Q20. How often do you consider the following nutritional labels or claims on the front of product packaging when deciding to purchase food and beverage products? Total, n=1002
Note: Examples and images of each type of label were included in survey

Nutrition Facts Highlights FOP Label is Important when Shopping for Self and Children

Nutrition Facts highlights carry more importance for consumers themselves, while ingredient-specific labels and allergen/food intolerance declaration labels are of greater importance when shopping for children.



Q21. Which of the following nutritional labels or claims on the front of product packaging is most important when purchasing food and beverage products to buy for yourself? Please select only your top answer. *If considered any aspect of packaging always/often*, n=664

Q22. Which of the following nutritional labels or claims on the front of product packaging is most important when purchasing food and beverage products for your children? Please select only your top answer. *If considered any aspect of packaging always/often and Parents*, n=408

Note: Examples and images of each type of label were included in survey

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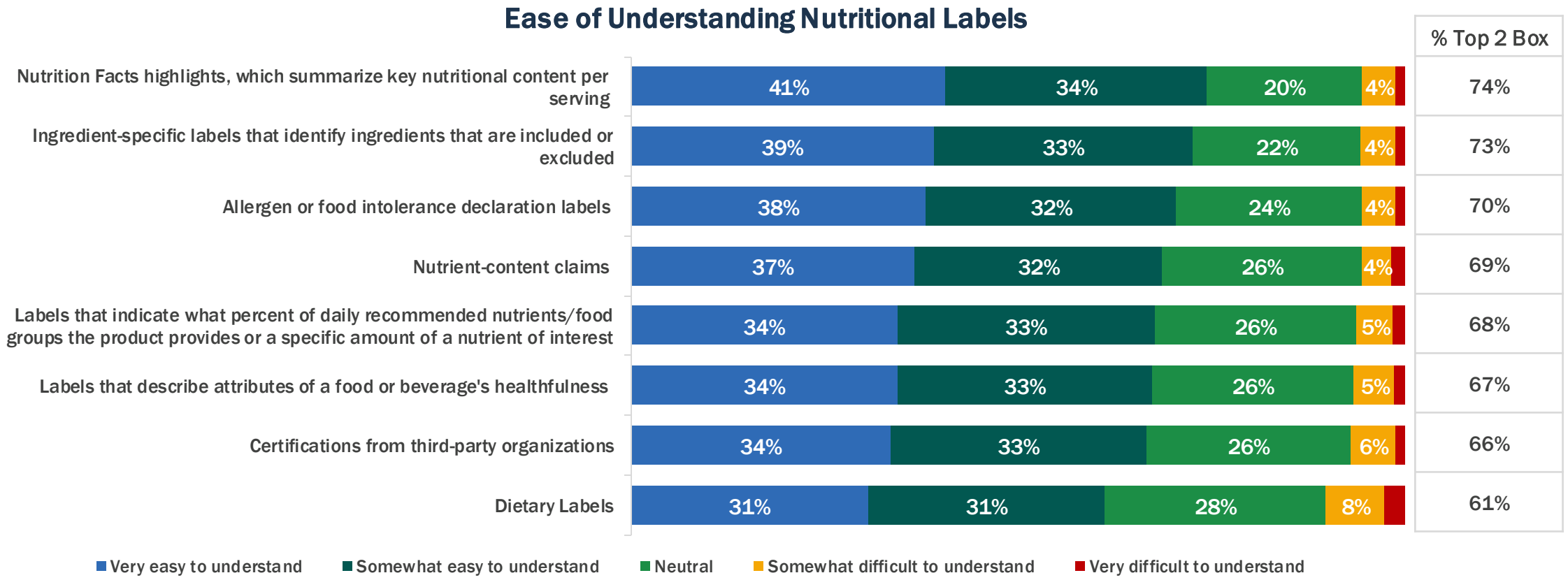
Ease of Understanding Nutritional FOP Labels Is Relatively High

Even though third-party certifications are often considered and highly trusted, they are second to last in terms of their understandability.



Q24. In general, when you come across these nutritional labels and claims on the front of food and beverage product packaging, how easy or difficult is it to understand what they are communicating?
Total, n=1002
Note: Examples and images of each type of label were included in survey

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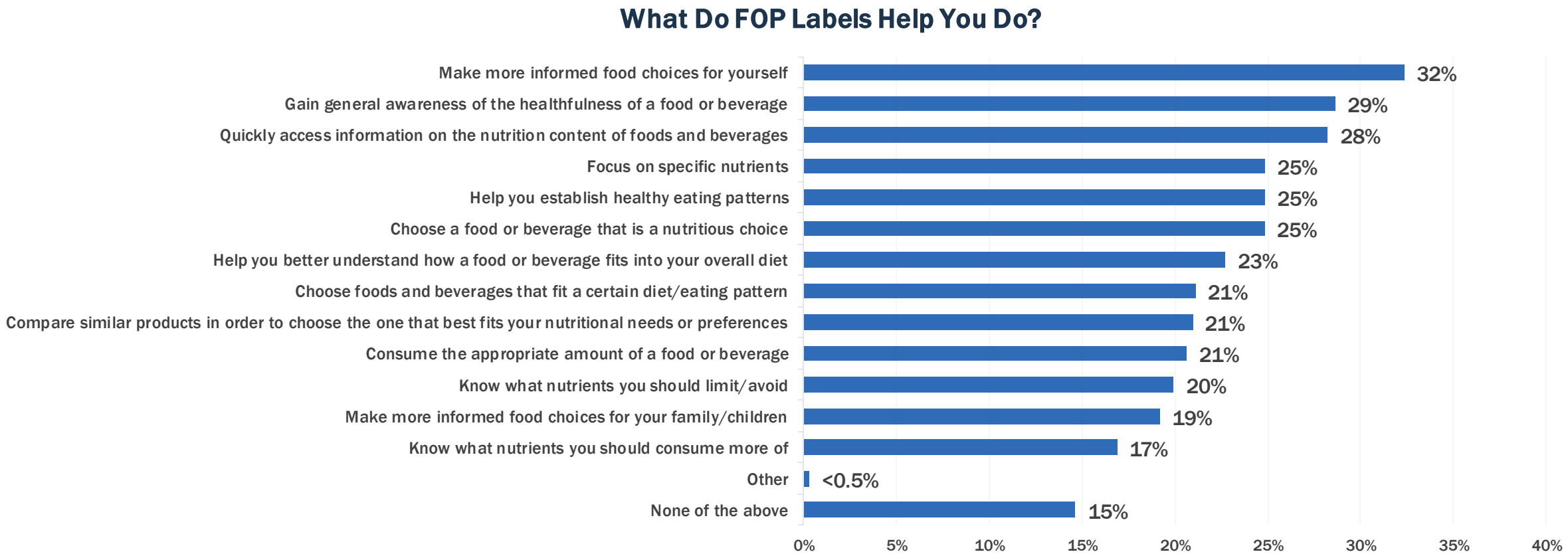
FOP Labels Help Consumers Make Informed Choices

Gaining general awareness and quickly accessing information on nutrition content follow closely behind.

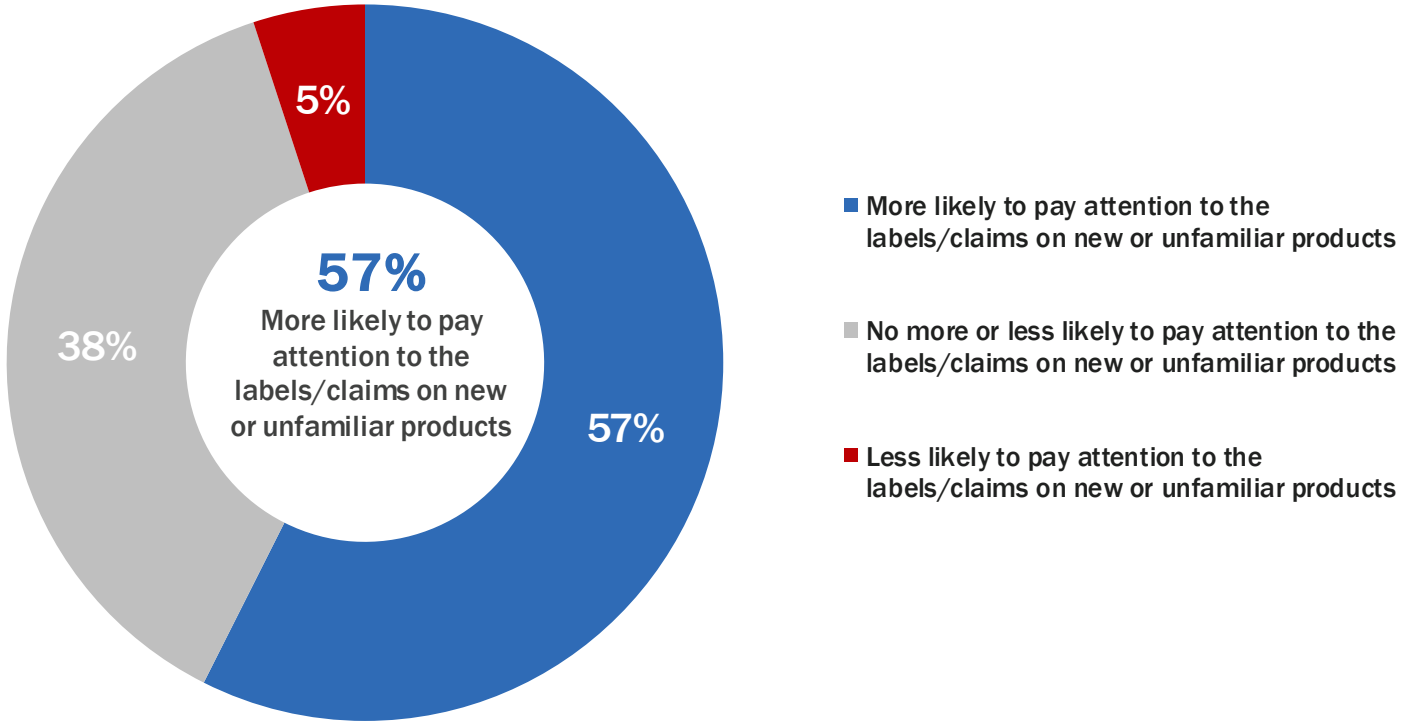


Q23. Which of the following, if any, do these nutritional labels and claims on the front of food and beverage product packaging help you do? Select all that apply. Total, n=1002

Over Half Are More Likely to Review FOP Labels on New Products

Those who report being in excellent/very good health are more likely to review labels on new products (64% vs. 51% of those in good/fair/poor health).

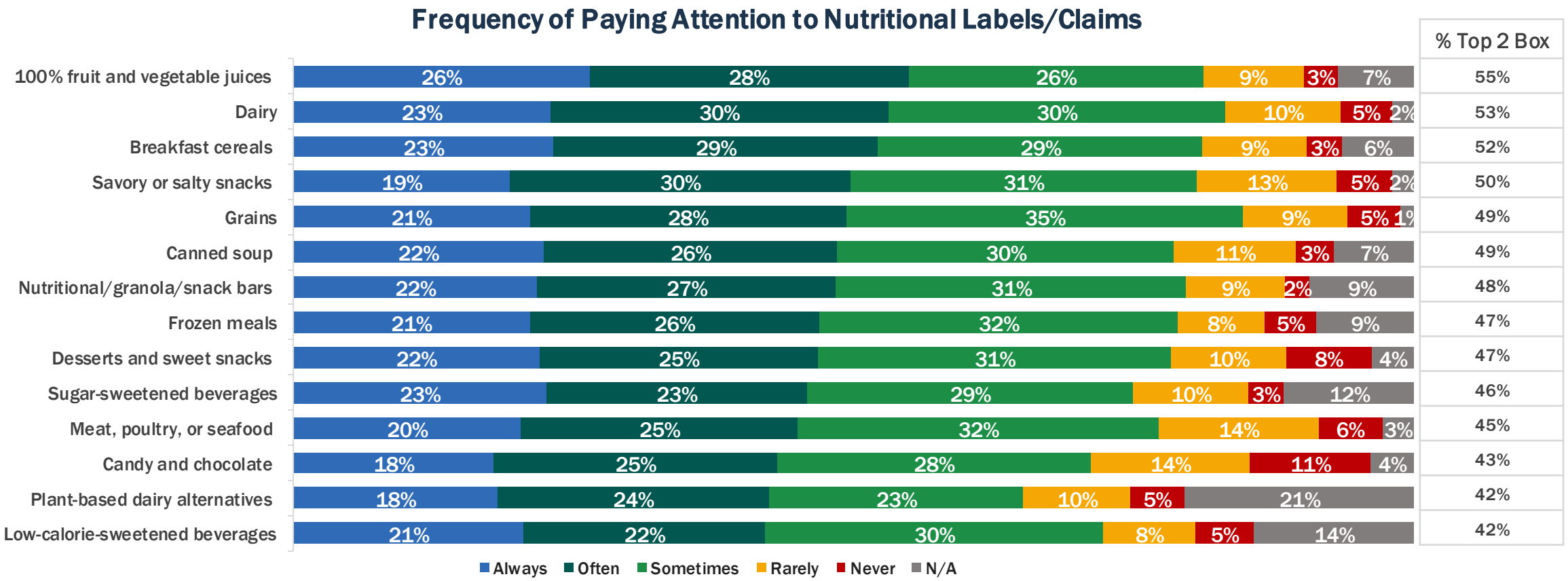
Likelihood Of Reviewing Labels/Claims When Purchasing A New Product



Q25. Are you more or less likely to pay attention to these labels/claims when considering purchasing a new or unfamiliar food or beverage product? *If considers FOP labels*, n=854

Juices, Dairy, Breakfast Cereals, and Snacks Garner More FOP Review

Label review for sweet treats like desserts, sweetened beverages and candy and chocolate ranks relatively lower.



Q26. How often do you pay attention to nutritional labels and claims on the front of product packaging when shopping for the following? *If considers FOP labels*, n=854

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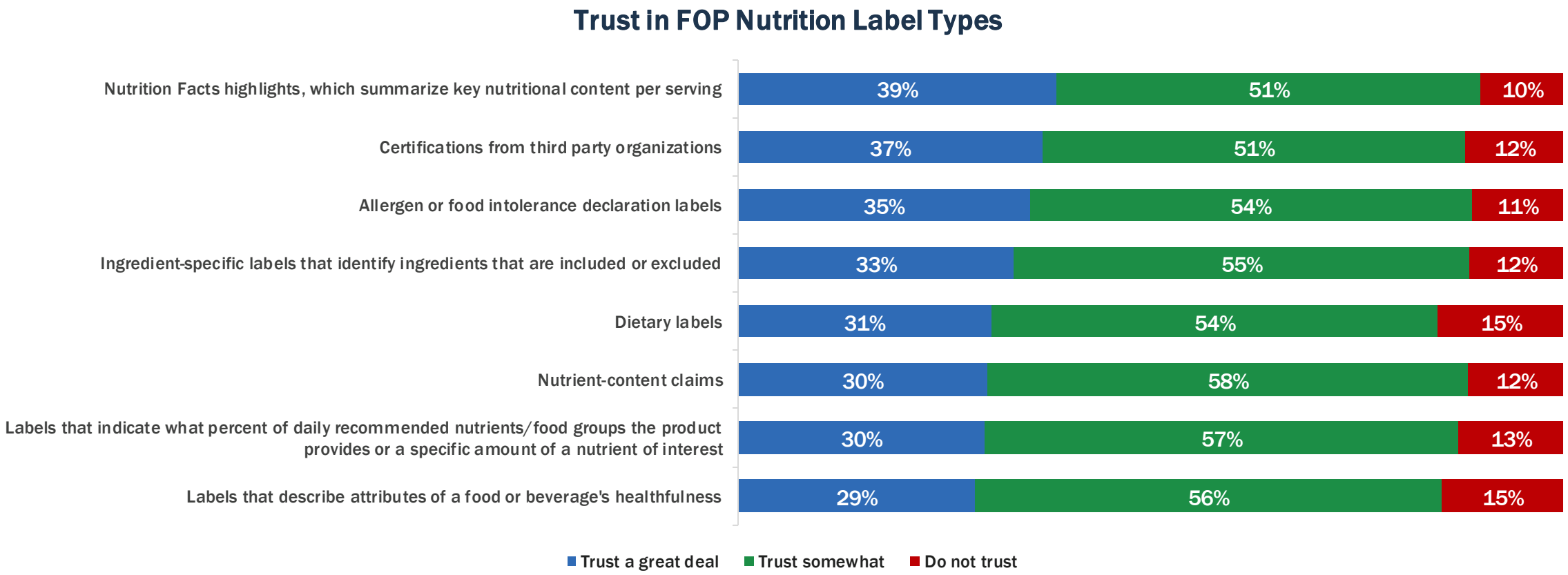
Trust In Labels

Nutrition Facts Highlights and Certifications Are Most Trusted FOP Labels

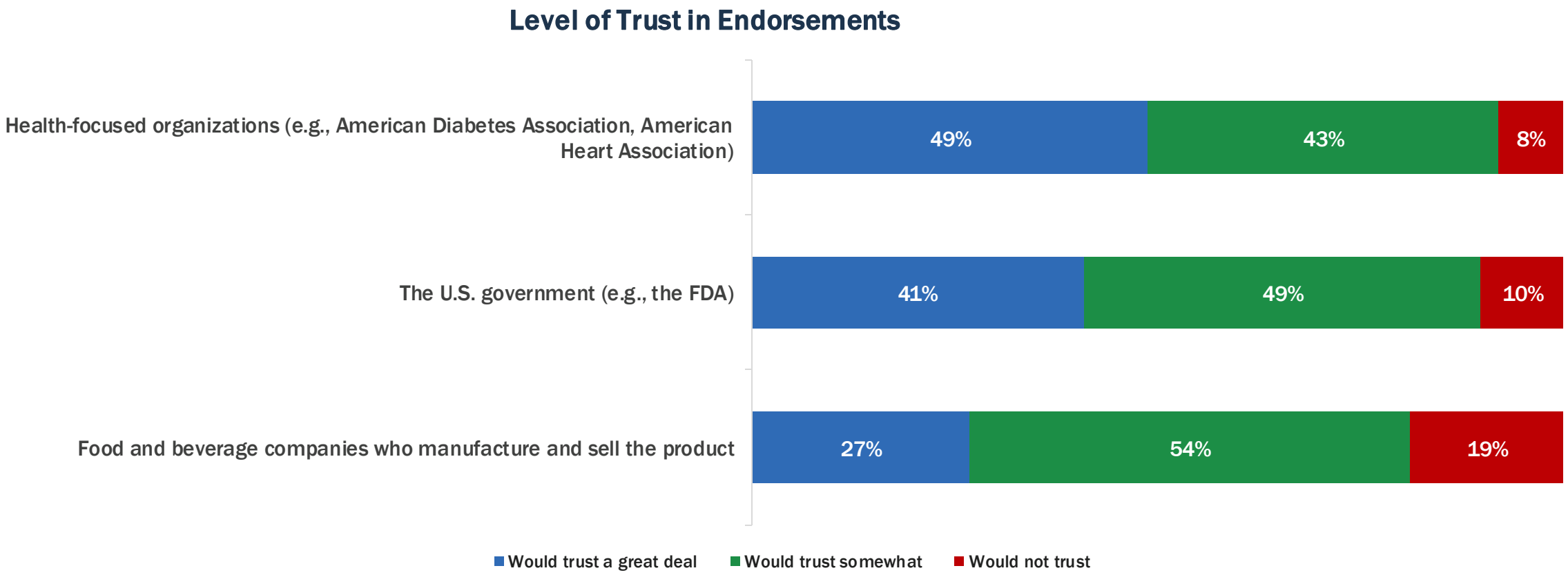
Most consumers have at least some degree of trust for all types of FOP labels and claims.



Q38. To what extent would you say you trust each of the following labels and claims on the front of food and beverage product packaging? Total, n=1002
Note: Examples and images of each type of label were included in survey

Health-focused Organizations and The U.S. Government Are Most Trusted

However, 8 in 10 would also trust the food and beverage companies who manufacture and sell the product.



Q39. In general, how much would you trust labels and claims on the front of food and beverage product packaging if the claims were made/endorsed by...? Total, n=1002

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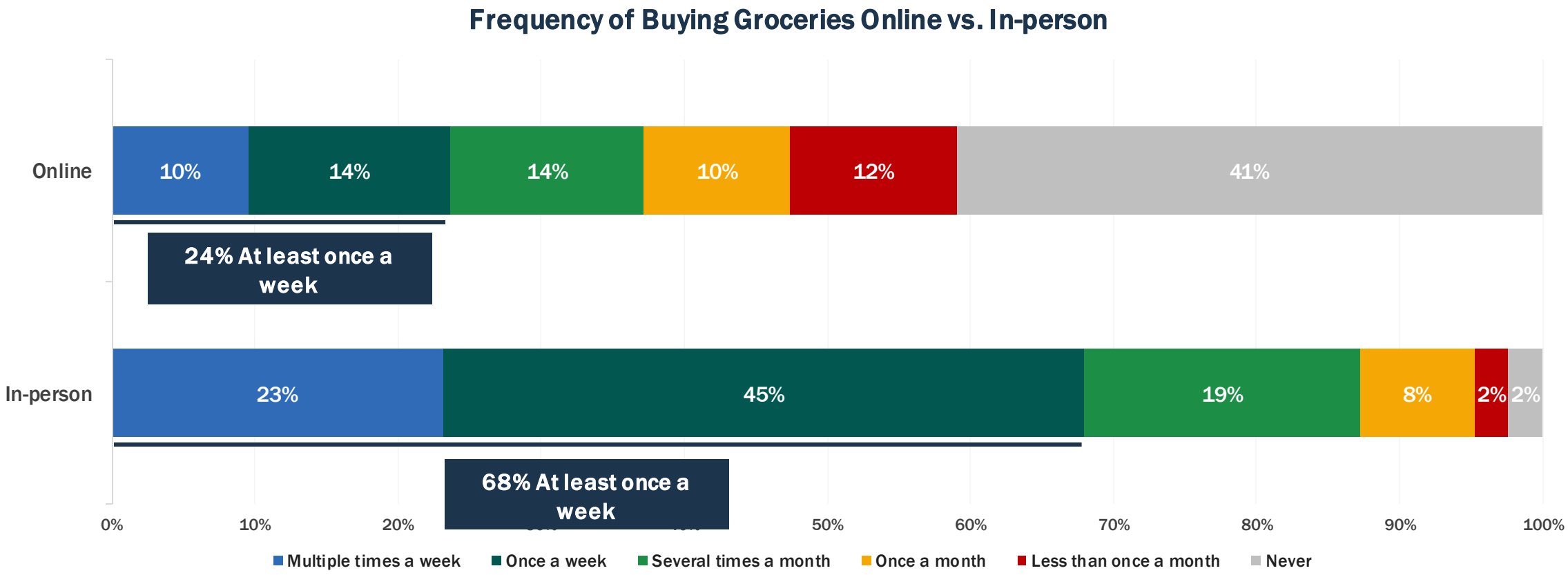
Online Shopping and Mobile Apps

In-person is Still the Most Common Way to Grocery Shop

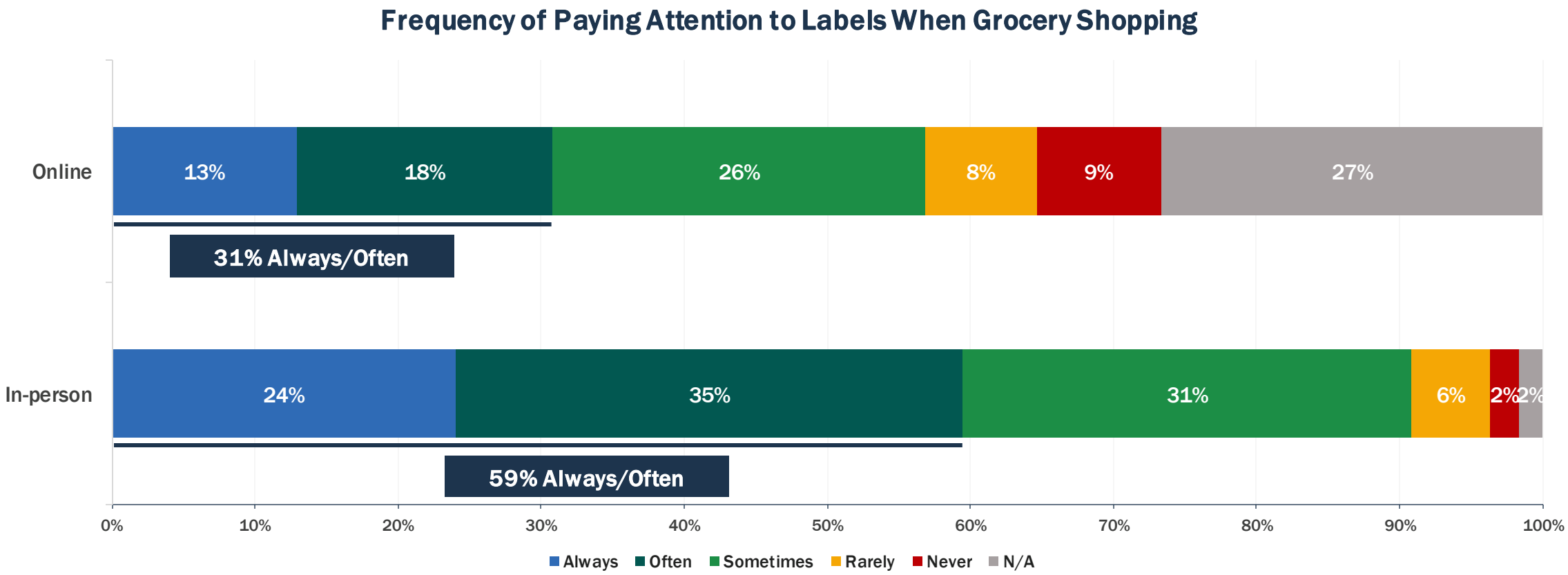
However, a quarter do their grocery shopping online at least once a week. Online grocery shopping is more common among consumers under age 50 (34% weekly vs. 11% age 50+) and those with children under 18 (43% weekly).



Q27. How often do you buy groceries... Total, n=1002

Paying Attention to FOP Labels Is More Common When Shopping In-person

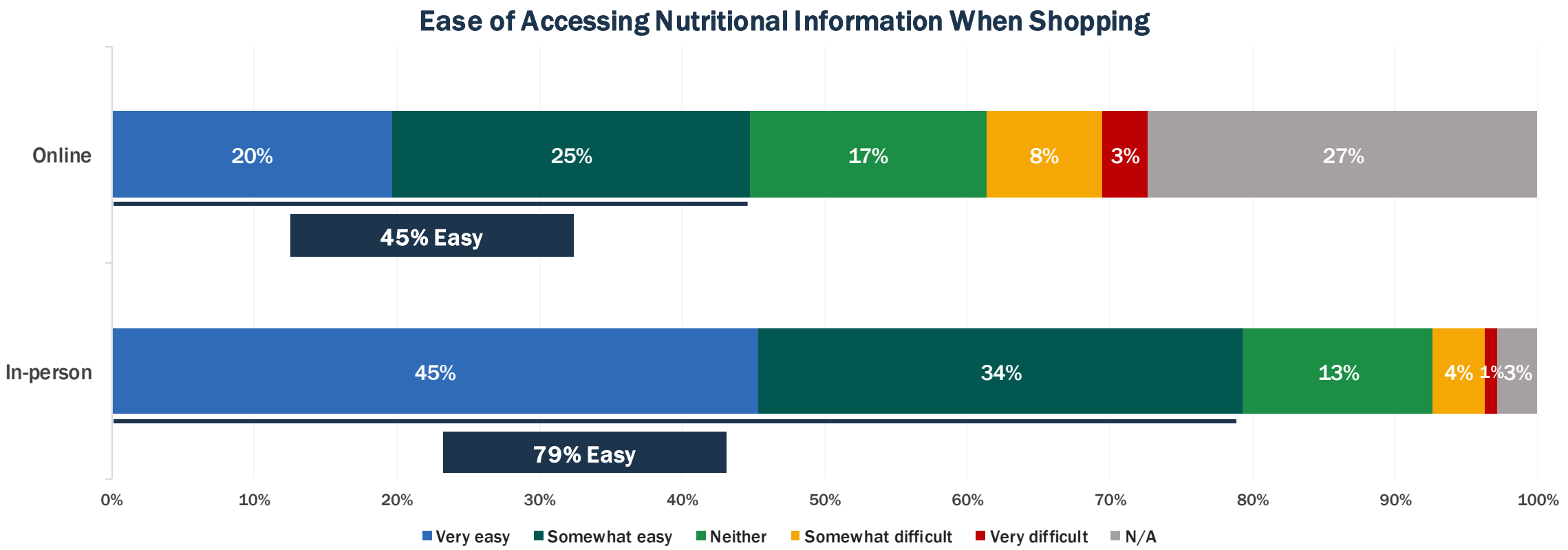
Nearly twice as many consumers report that they review FOP nutrition labels when shopping in person than online.



Q28. How often do you pay attention to nutritional labels and claims on the front of product packaging when purchasing food and beverage products... *If considers FOP labels*, n=854

Less than Half Find It Easy to Access Nutritional Info When Shopping Online

8 in 10 find it easy to access nutritional information when in-person.

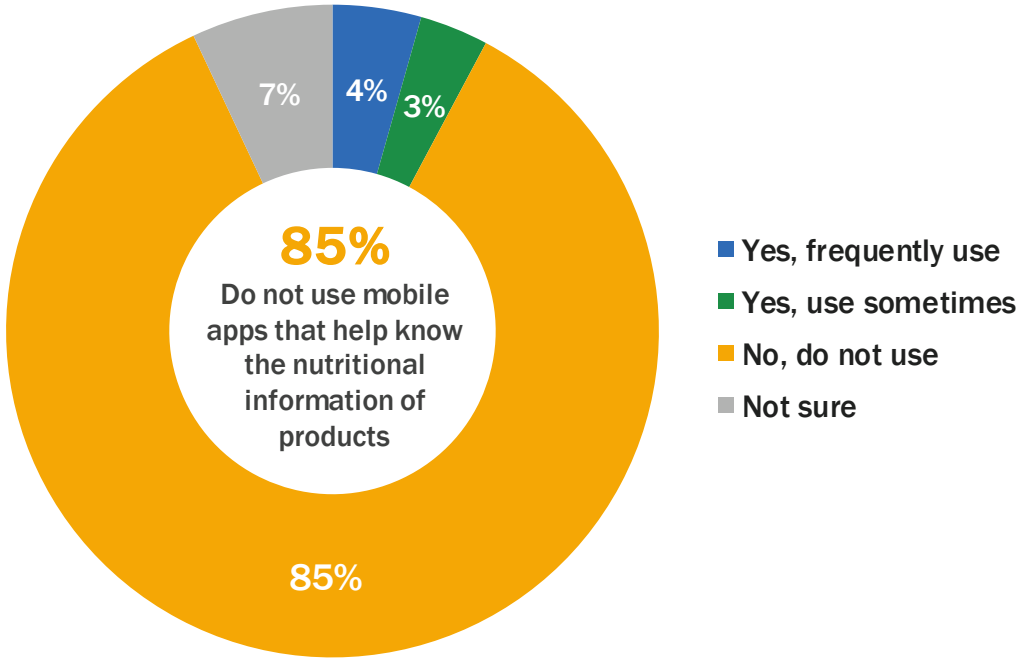


Q29. How easy is it to access nutritional information about certain food and beverage products when shopping... Total, n=1002

Most Consumers Do Not Use Mobile Apps for Nutritional Info

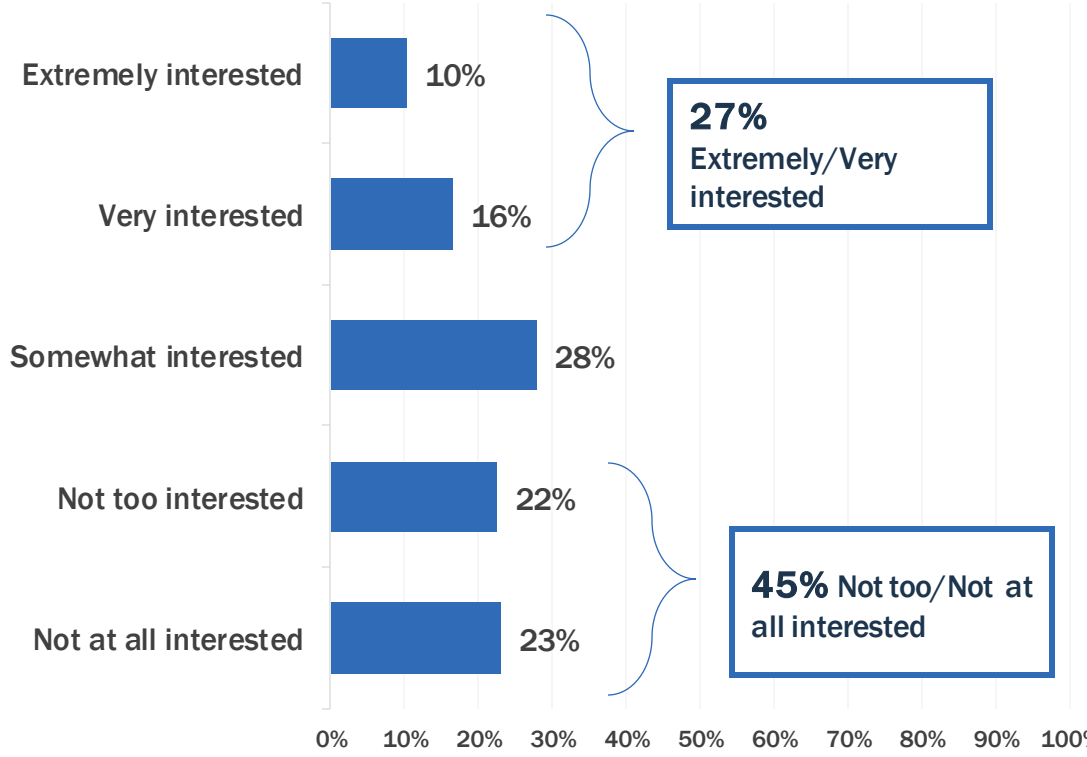
Of those who do not use them, over a quarter would be interested in using a mobile app. Interest is higher for consumers under age 50 (42% vs. 10% of those ages 50+) and consumers with children under 18 (52% vs. 21% of those without children under 18).

Usage of Mobile Apps to Know Nutritional Information



Interest Level in Mobile Apps

(Of Those Who Do Not Use Or Are Not Sure If They Use Mobile Apps)

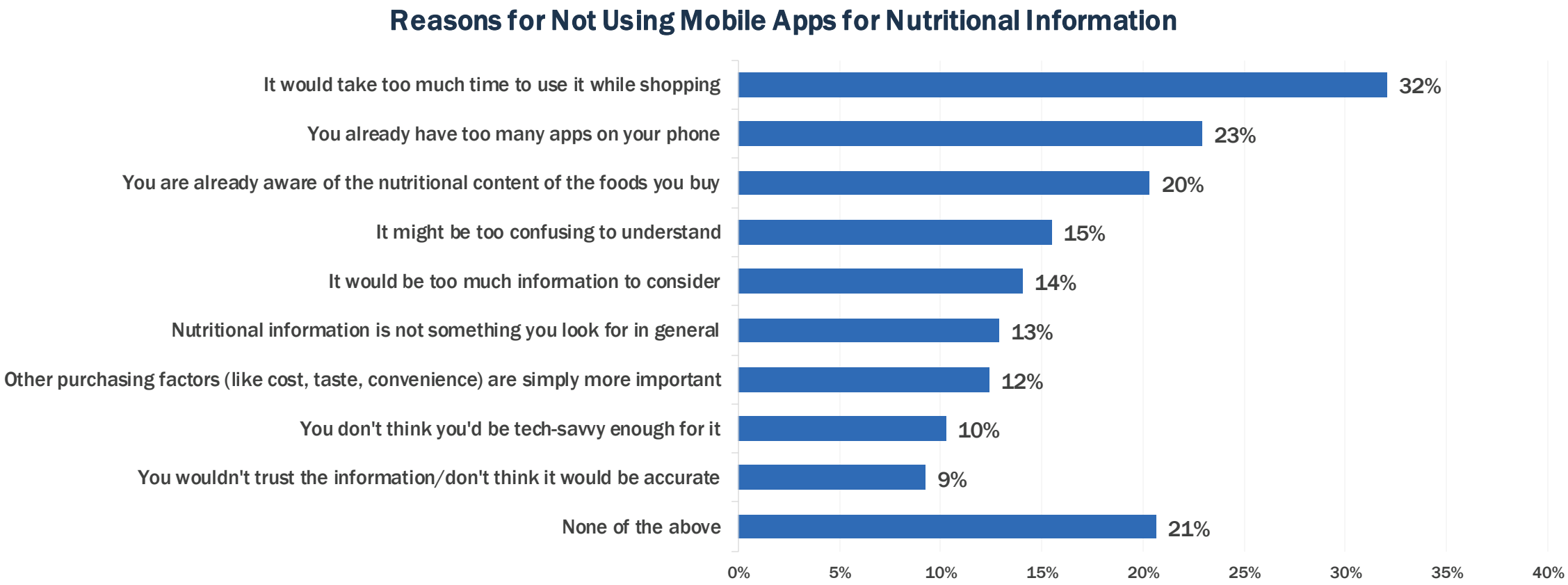


Q30. Do you ever use any mobile apps that help you know the nutritional information of food or beverage products? Total, n=1002

Q31. How interested would you be in using a mobile app that helped you know the nutritional information of food or beverage products? *If doesn't or isn't sure if they use mobile apps*, n=933

Many Think an App Would Take Too Much Time While Shopping

Having too many apps and already knowing the nutritional content of the food they buy are other top reasons for not wanting to use a mobile app.



Q32. Which of the following, if any, would be reasons why you would not use a mobile app that helps you know nutritional information for food or beverage products while shopping? Please select all that apply. *If does not frequently use apps*, n=957

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Label Preferences

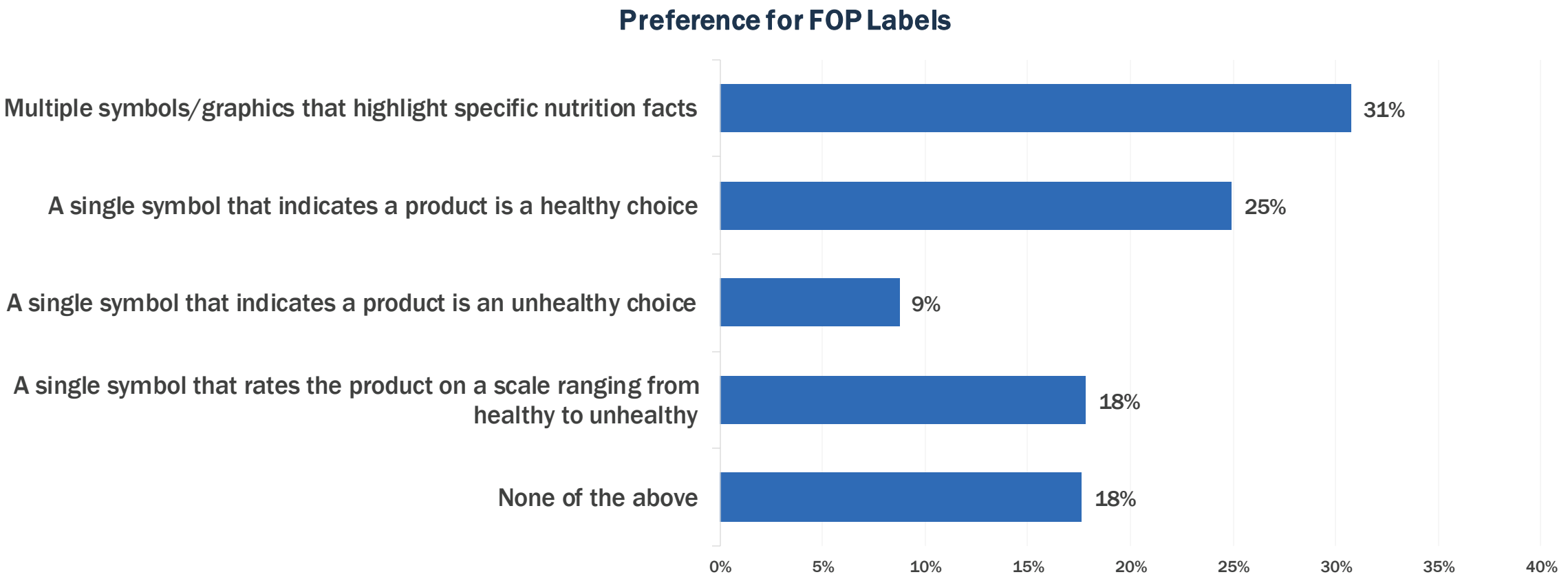
Consumers Are Content With the Amount of Info on Packaging

1 in 6 believe there is too much information, while a similar share believes there is not enough information on the front of product packaging.

Q35. Which of the following best describes your opinion on nutritional labels and claims on the front of food and beverage product packaging in general? Total, n=1002

Consumers Are Split on Their Preference for FOP Labels

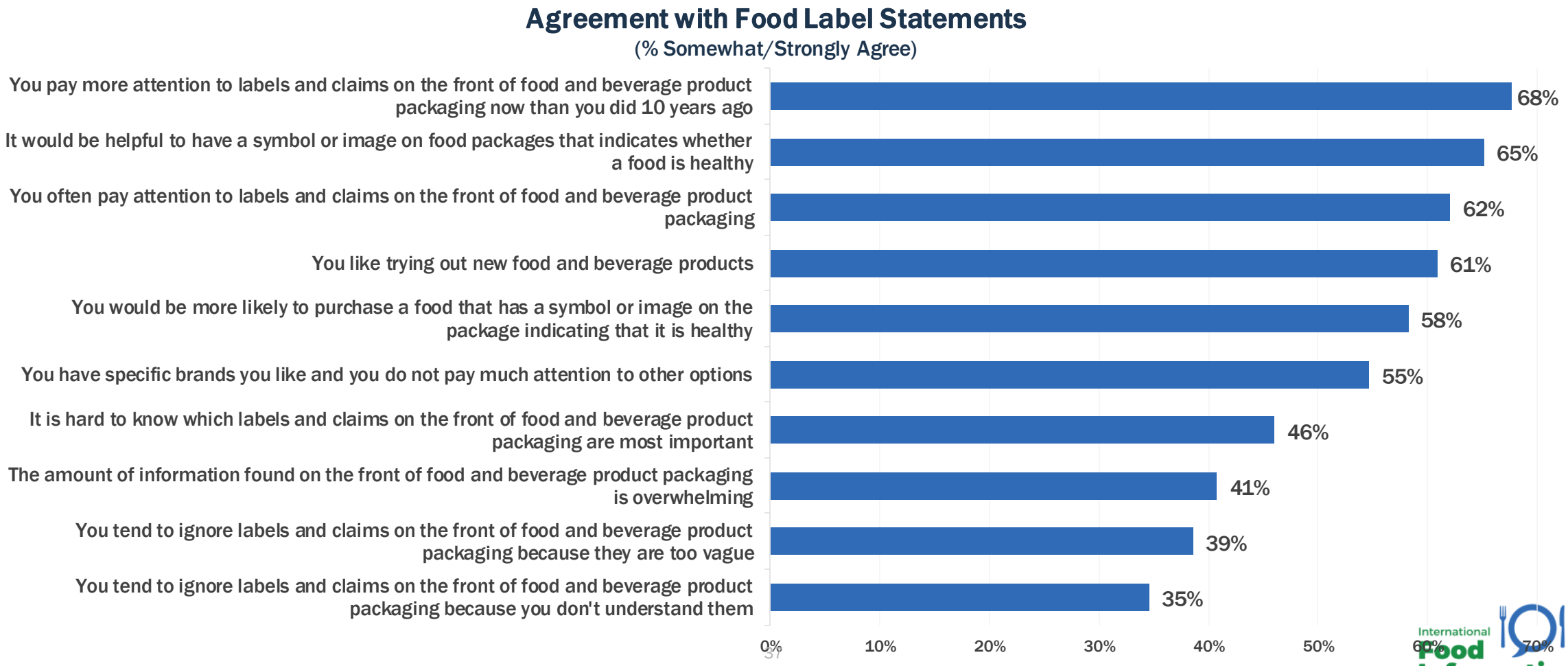
While multiple symbols highlighting specific nutrition facts wins out, a single symbol that indicates a product is a healthy choice is preferred by a quarter of consumers.



Q34. When it comes to the labels you might find on the front of food and beverage products you buy, which of the following would you prefer? Total, n=1002

Nearly 2 In 3 Agree It Would Be Helpful to Have a Symbol on Packaging Indicating That a Food is Healthy

Similar share also say that they pay more attention to FOP labels than they did 10 years ago.

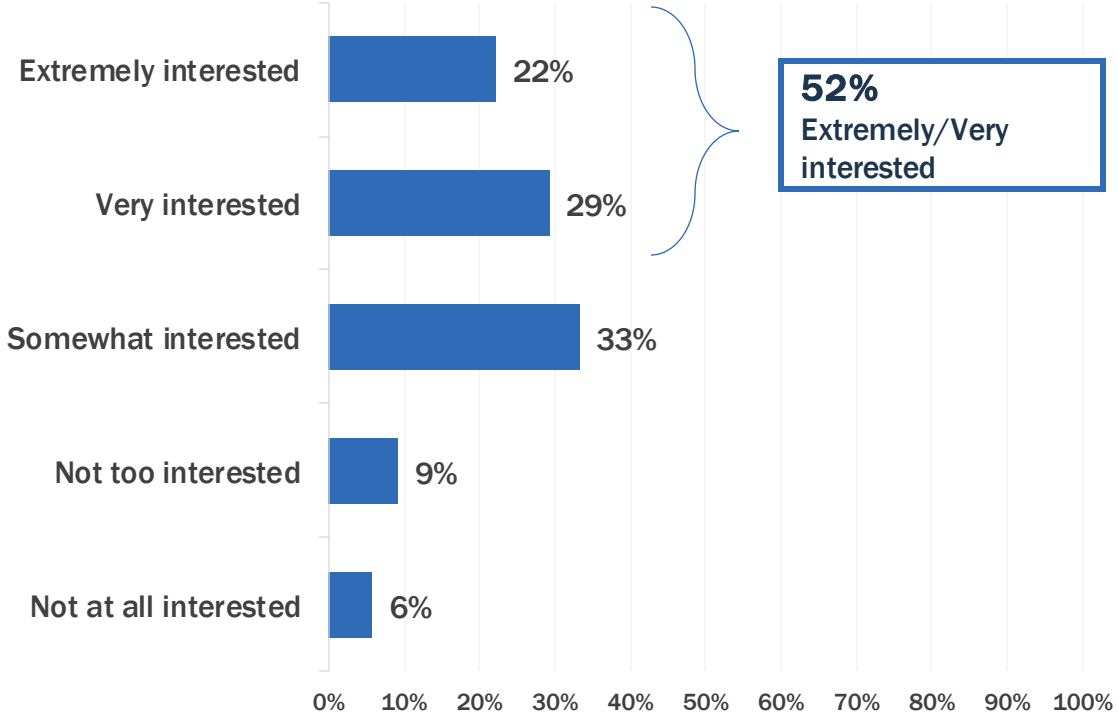


Q36. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following? Total, n=1002

Over Half Are Interested in Consistent FOP Labeling

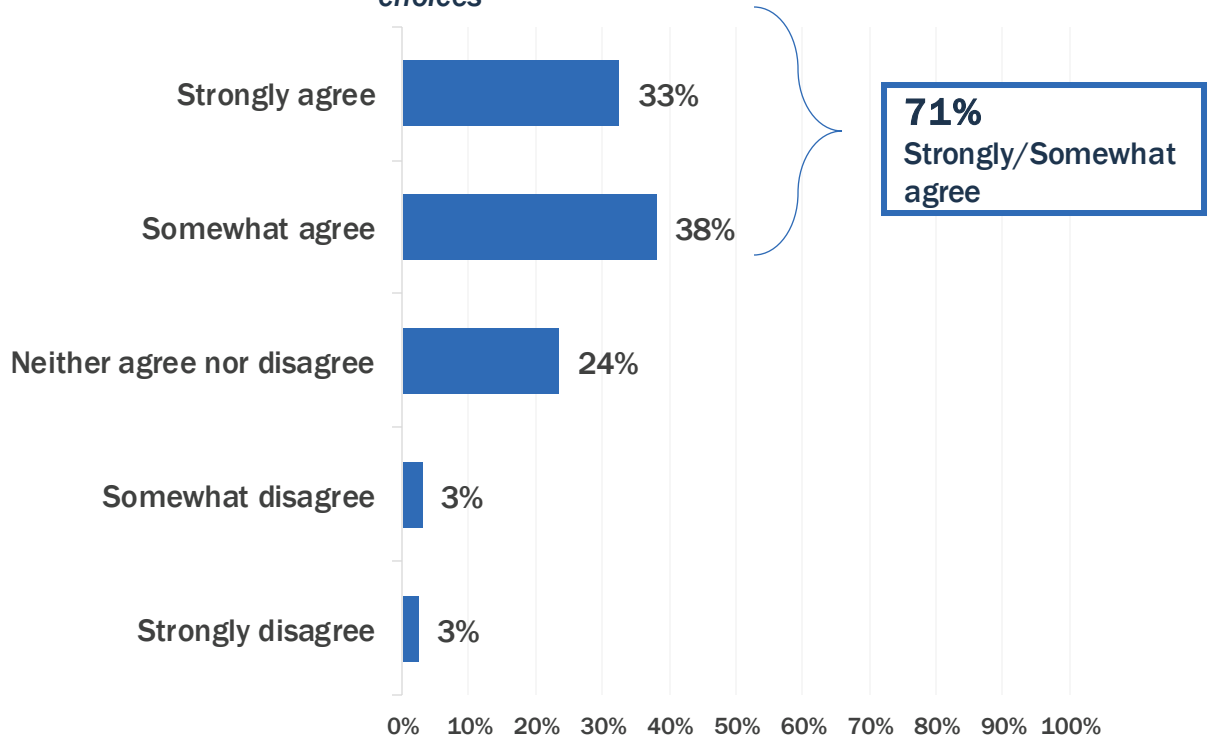
7 in 10 also agree that it would make it easier for them to make healthy choices if the FOP nutrition information was presented in a consistent way. African Americans and consumers under age 50 are more interested in keeping labels consistent.

Interest in Consistent Labeling



Agreement with Statement

"If nutrition information was presented in a consistent way on the front of all food and beverage packaging, it would make it easier to make healthy choices"



Q40. How interested would you be in having nutritional information presented in a consistent way on the front of all food and beverage packaging? Total, n=1002

Q41. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "If nutrition information was presented in a consistent way on the front of all food and beverage packaging, it would make it easier to make healthy choices." Total, n=1002

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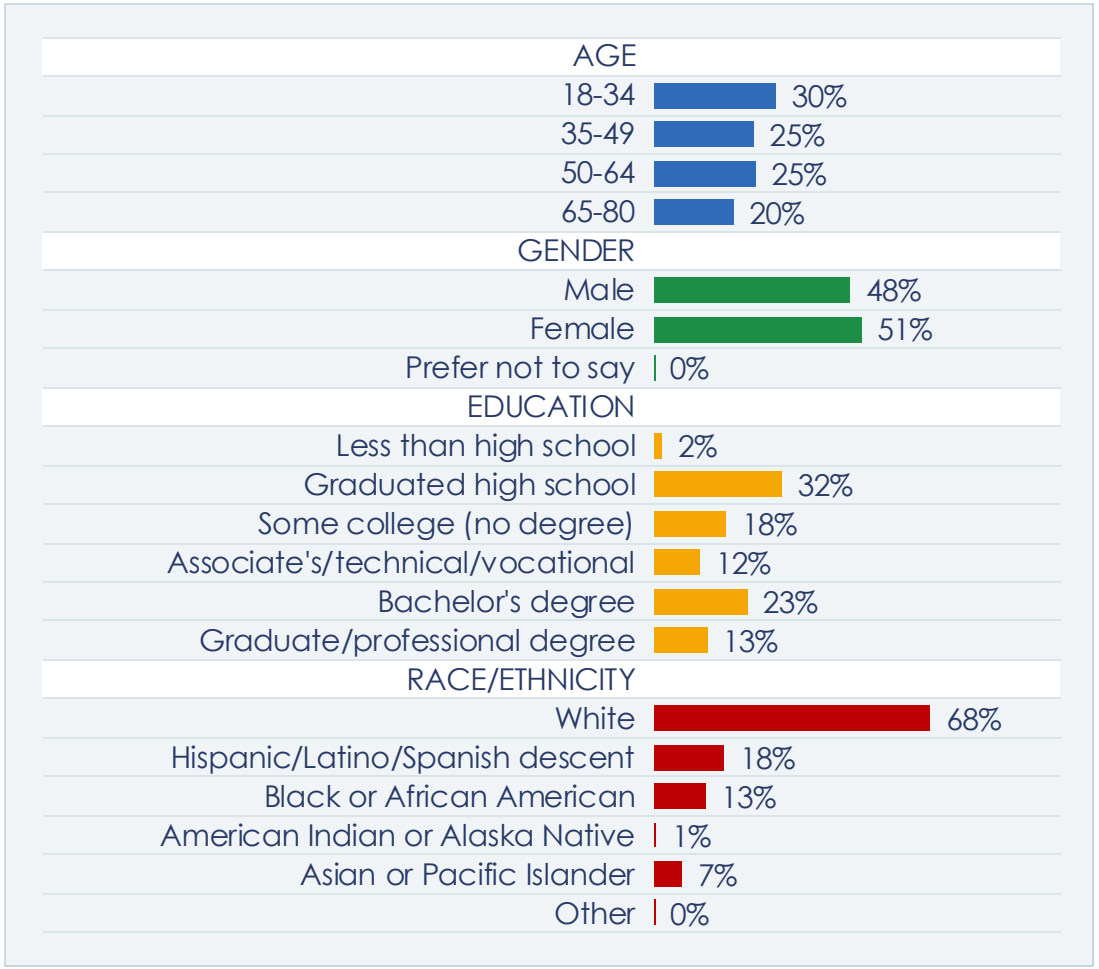
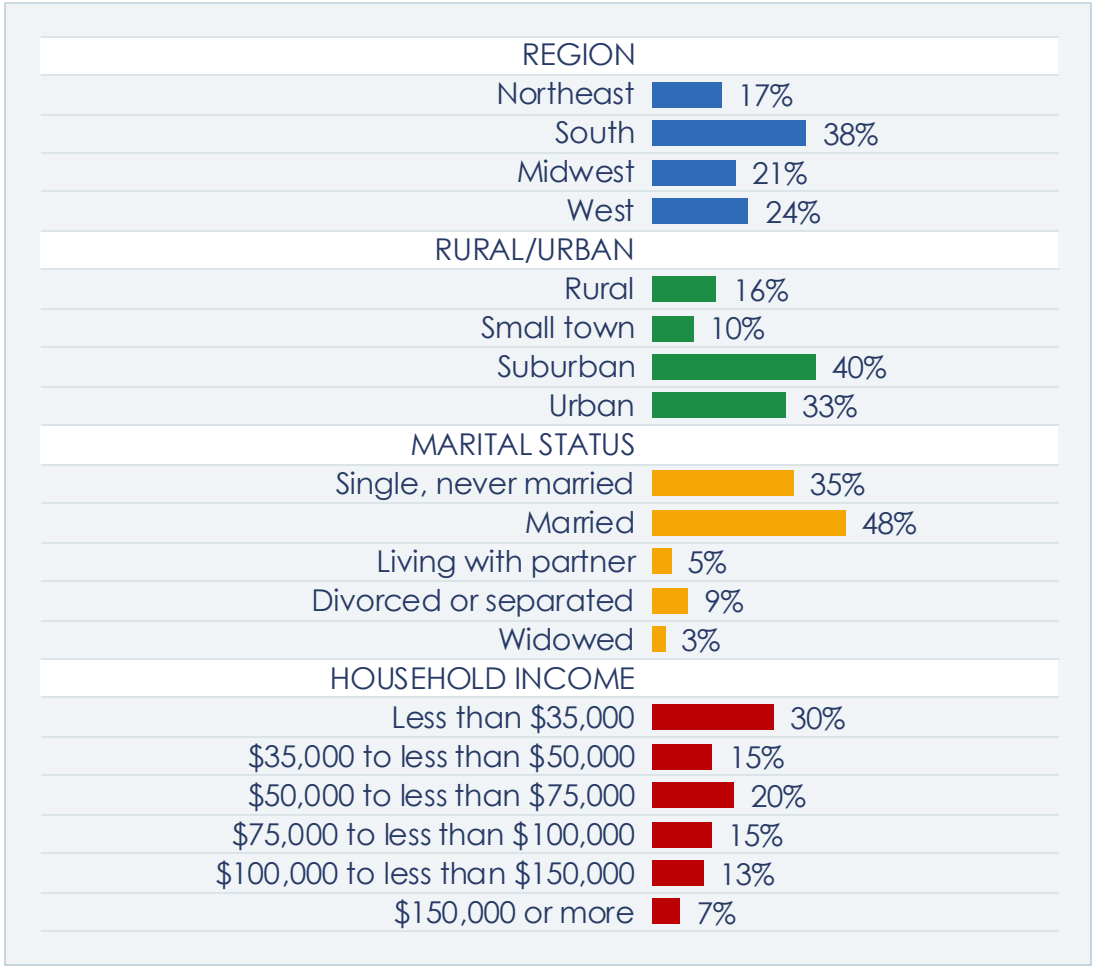
Survey Demographics

Demographics





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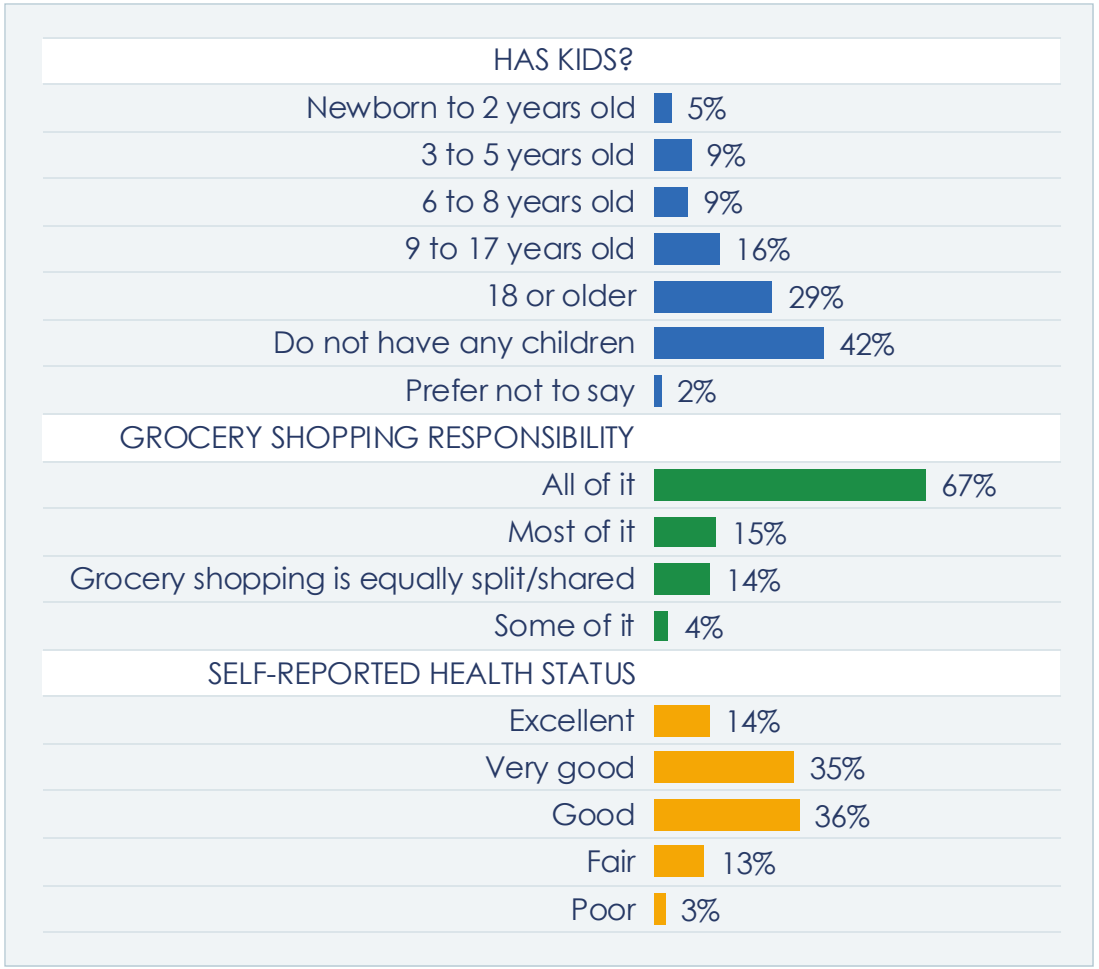

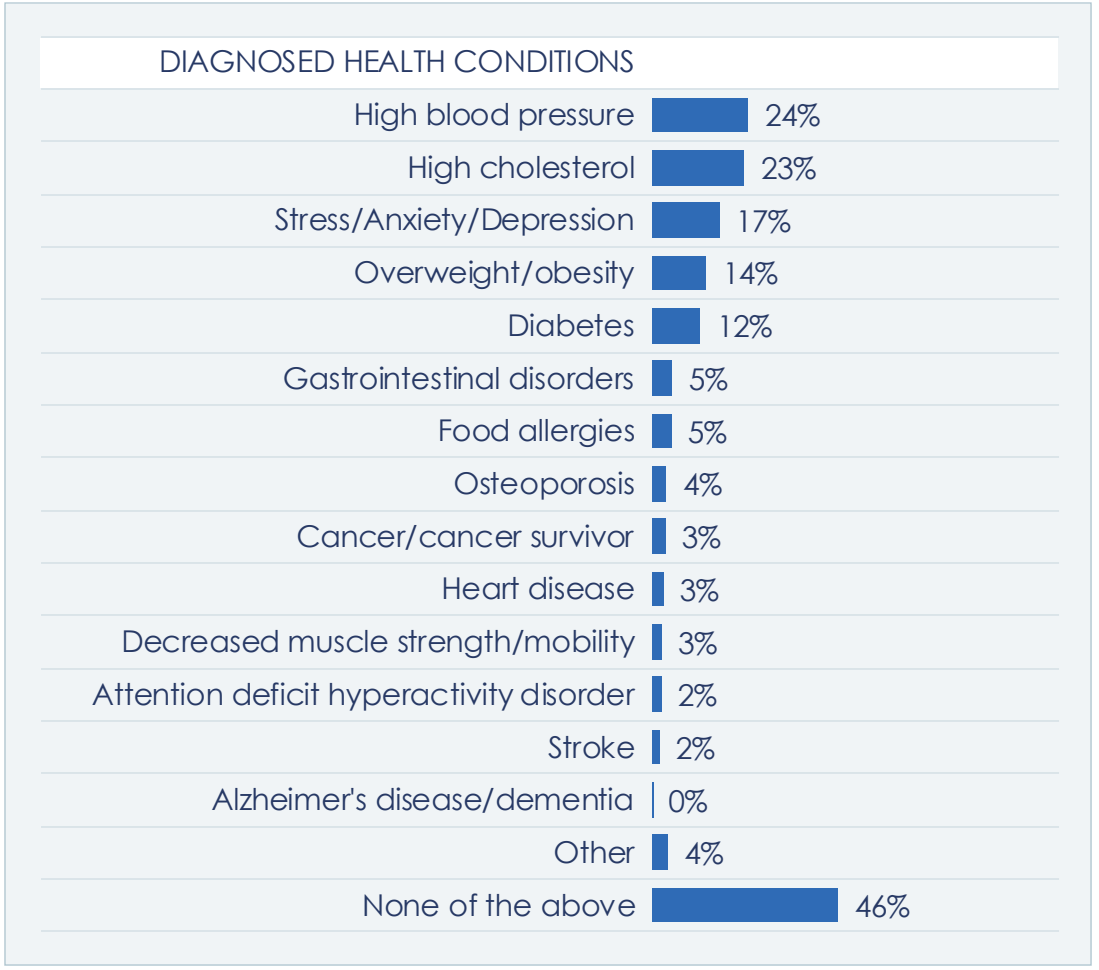

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