

"How Many People Order Vegetarian Meals When Eating Out?"

Asks a 2008 Vegetarian Resource Group Poll

IN PAST VEGETARIAN RESOURCE GROUP POLLS, we have generally found that 2 to 3 percent of the U.S. population never consumes meat, fish, or fowl and, thus, is vegetarian. But how many customers order meatless meals when eating out? To answer this question, VRG conducted a Zogby Poll in 1999 and again in 2008.

We asked, "When you eat out, do you..."

- 1) Sometimes order a dish without meat, fish, or fowl?
 - 2) Often order a dish without meat, fish, or fowl?
 - 3) Always order a dish without meat, fish, or fowl?
 - 4) Never order a dish without meat, fish, or fowl?
- Not sure"

What is fascinating to us is that there are more than double the number of people who always order vegetarian food out than there are actual vegetarians. This was true in 1999 and 2008. In both years, over half the population sometimes, often, or always orders meatless meals. Certainly restaurant owners and food service managers need to stay innovative in their vegetarian meal offerings. If a meatless dish is appealing, more than half the population are potential customers. For information about the top 10 restaurant chains for people eating meatless meals, see the Issue 4, 2008, of *Vegetarian Journal* and <www.vrg.org>.

The number of people who never order meat, fish, or fowl rose slightly from 1999 to 2008, while individuals who sometimes order a dish without meat, fish or fowl stayed about the same. However, those often ordering a dish without meat, fish, or fowl went down. There could be many factors. We wonder if this is just deviation due to statistical error or possibly partially due to the promotion of organic and certified animal products by the sustainable movements and the humane animal groups.

The high percentage of Latinos saying they eat vegetarian meals out (10 percent) is striking. This could be a mistake, but it does correlate with the high numbers previous VRG polls and others' surveys have found.

It is interesting that approximately 40 percent of the country sometimes orders a dish without meat, fish, or fowl, while a nearly equal part of the population never orders a vegetarian dish. This is similar to the division in the country concerning most beliefs but is not at all split along party lines. For example, 38.9 percent of Republicans sometimes order a dish without meat, fish, or fowl, while 38.8 percent of Democrats do the same. Therefore, ordering vegetarian dishes is a nice attribute we can all have in common, no matter what our other beliefs are. However, the difference in desires makes it more complex for restaurants and food services to meet the needs of various customers.

THE POLL RESULTS: When you eat out, do you...

	2008	1999
1) Sometimes order a dish without meat, fish, or fowl?	40.3%	40.8%
2) Often order a dish without meat, fish, or fowl?	8.4%	11.7%
3) Always order a dish without meat, fish, or fowl?	6.7%	5.5%
4) Never order a dish without meat, fish, or fowl?	41.1%	38.9%

When you eat out, do you ALWAYS order a dish without meat, fish, or fowl? "Yes."

Total	6.7%	Ages 18-24	9.1%	Democrat	8.2%	Catholic	3.3%
Male	8.7%	25-34	5.2%	Republican	7.1%	Protestant	5.8%
Female	4.8%	35-54	8.5%	Progressive	8.3%	Jewish	15.0%
		55-69	2.3%	Liberal	4.1%	Born Again	8.9%
Eastern U.S.	3.9%	White	6.2%	Moderate	5.1%		
South	10.5%	Hispanic	10.0%	Conservative	8.1%		
Central	4.8%	African American	3.9%	Very Conservative	13.6%		
West	8.1%	Asian	19.1%	Libertarian	6.6%		

When you eat out, do you SOMETIMES order a dish without meat, fish or fowl? "Yes."

Male	36.1%	Total	40.3%
Female	44.2%		

Dining Habits of All Total Respondents

Sometimes Order Vegetarian	40.3%
Never Order Vegetarian	41.1%

About This Poll

This survey was conducted on behalf of The Vegetarian Resource Group by Zogby International in a national U.S. telephone survey of 1,201 adults. Calls were made April 10 through April 12, 2008. Weighting (by region, party, age, race, religion, gender) is used to adjust for non-response and to better represent the actual population. The margin of error is plus or minus 2.9 percentage points. If we do the same poll 100 times, in 95 cases out of 100, we will most likely obtain the same response plus or minus 2.9 percent. There can be other sources of survey error, such as how questions are phrased. Margins of error are higher in subgroups. The questions concerning political affiliation also have a higher margin of error.

Because The Vegetarian Resource Group asked if survey participants "always" order a dish without meat, fish, or fowl, we will obtain lower percentages than others who simply ask if you are vegetarian or if you eat vegetarian without defining the term. When making decisions for marketing and meal development purposes, you should understand both numbers and types of groups.

Charles Stahler, one of the Co-Directors of The Vegetarian Resource Group, supervised this project.

NOTES FROM THE VRG SCIENTIFIC DEPARTMENT

VRG IN THE NEWS

Vegetarian Resource Group Nutrition Advisor Reed Mangels, PhD, RD, was interviewed for an article about 8- to 13-year-old vegetarians in the *KidsPost* section of the *Washington Post*, a story about teen vegetarians in the *Berkshire Eagle* (Pittsfield, MA), and a piece about Meatless Mondays for *Today's Dietitian*.

VRG OUTREACH

Vegetarian Resource Group Nutrition Advisor Reed Mangels, PhD, RD, staffed The VRG's booth at the 5th International Congress on Vegetarian Nutrition in Loma Linda, CA, in the spring. She also participated in a poster session at the event, creating a display titled "How Many Vegetarians Are There?" that focused on VRG's poll results. In addition, Vegetarian Resource Group Food Service Advisor Nancy Berkoff, RD, EdD, CCE, is happy to report that The VRG's online vegetarian course has been accepted by the American Culinary Federation for chefs completing their continuing education credits in nutrition.