

A Focus On **Food & Ingredient Safety**

An annual survey of American consumers to understand perceptions, beliefs, and behaviors surrounding food and food-purchasing decisions. 2026 marks the 21st consecutive year that the International Food Information Council (IFIC) has commissioned the *IFIC Food & Health Survey*.



For more than two decades, the International Food Information Council's Food & Health Survey has tracked how Americans think about food, nutrition, health, and the role these factors play in food decisions. Now in its 21st consecutive year, the 2026 IFIC Food & Health Survey continues that legacy while expanding its reach, with a Canadian sample (n=1006) included for the first time to enable cross-border comparisons between U.S. and Canada consumers.

Key findings from this year's online survey of **3,005 Americans** focus on:

- Familiarity with U.S. Dietary Guidelines and the new Food Pyramid
- "Ultraprocessed foods," including familiarity with the term and criteria used to identify them
- Criteria used to define "healthy" food
- Personal eating patterns, diet scores, and the ease of maintaining dietary habits
- Trust in food information sources, including exposure, use, and impact of social media and artificial intelligence (AI)
- Approaches to sugar consumption and opinions of low- and no-calorie sweeteners
- Food and beverage purchase-drivers, including by income
- Food cost and affordability
- Prescription weight-loss medications, including usage, personal experiences, and perceptions of safety and efficacy
- Confidence in the safety of the food supply, including the top food safety issues and perceived safety of imported and domestic foods
- Safe food-handling practices
- Awareness of state-level food regulation efforts
- Beliefs about agriculture, climate change, environmental sustainability, food production, food technologies, and pesticides

In this report, findings are presented for all U.S. survey respondents (n=3005).

Note: Significant changes in trend vs. 2025 (and/or in some cases, prior years) are indicated using up-and-down arrows and/or call-out boxes.

Note: Totals may not add up or equal 100% due to rounding.

IFIC FOOD & HEALTH SURVEY OVERVIEW

- An online survey of **3,005 Americans**.
- The survey was fielded from **March 22 – April 8, 2026**.
- On average, the survey took **~20 minutes** to complete.
- The survey was conducted via **Dynata's consumer panel**.

SUGGESTED CITATION:

International Food Information Council. 2026 IFIC Food & Health Survey: A Focus on Food & Ingredient Safety. September 2026. [<https://iflc.org/research/2026-iflc-food-health-survey-food-ingredient-safety/>]

WEIGHTING

The results were weighted to ensure that they are reflective of the American population ages 18 to 80 years, as seen in the [2025 Current Population Survey](#). Specifically, results were weighted by age, education, gender, race/ethnicity, and region.

RESEARCH PARTNER

IFIC commissions Greenwald Research to conduct its annual *Food & Health Survey*.





EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A Focus On Food & Ingredient Safety



**FOOD & HEALTH
SURVEY**



A FOCUS ON FOOD & INGREDIENT SAFETY

Americans' confidence in the safety of the U.S. food supply rebounds sharply from last year's record low.

This year marks the 15th consecutive year that the *IFIC Food & Health Survey* has asked Americans about their confidence in the safety of the U.S. food supply. First introduced in 2008, it remains the survey's longest-running food safety measure.

Overall confidence rose from the survey low of 55% in 2025 to 62% in 2026. This seven-percentage-point increase matches the largest year-over-year gain in the trend, previously recorded in 2018. The share who are very confident accounted for most of the increase, rising five percentage points from 11% to 16%.

Historical context puts the rebound in perspective. In the five-year trend, confidence is six percentage points below the 68% recorded in 2022. Across ten years, it is nearly unchanged from 61% in 2017. Across fifteen years, however, it remains 16 points below the 78% record high in 2012. Recent results have fluctuated sharply, rising to 70% in 2023, falling to 62% in 2024 and 55% in 2025, and returning to 62% this year.

Pesticides, carcinogens, and foodborne illness remain Americans' leading food safety issues.

The survey first tracked Americans' most important food safety issues in the [2009 IFIC Food & Health Survey](#) and revisited the topic periodically thereafter. The current consecutive trend, which asks respondents to rank their top three issues, begins in 2024.

In 2026, pesticides appear most often among Americans' top three food safety issues at 48%, followed by carcinogens at 46% and foodborne illness at 43%.

Among first-place rankings, foodborne illness has ranked first or tied for first in each of the past three years, (20% in 2024, 23% in 2025, 19% in 2026). Rounding out the 2026 top five first-place rankings are carcinogens (16%), pesticides (15%), food additives and ingredients (13%), and heavy metals (10%).

Since 2024, top-three selection of carcinogens has declined from 52% to 46%, and foodborne illness has declined from 47% to 43%. Food additives and ingredients increased from 30% to 37%, while pesticides changed little at 46% and 48%.

A FOCUS ON FOOD & INGREDIENT SAFETY

Among those ranking additives, ingredients, or chemicals as top food safety issues, more than four in ten prioritize the presence of an ingredient or chemical over its amount or the total number present.

In the 2026 IFIC Food & Health Survey, nearly all respondents (95%) ranked at least one of four ingredient- or chemical-related concerns among their top three food safety issues: food additives and ingredients, heavy metals, pesticides, or carcinogens.

These respondents were then asked what matters most when deciding whether an ingredient or chemical in a food or beverage might pose a health risk. Among this group, 45% prioritize whether the ingredient or chemical is present, 33% prioritize how much is present, and 22% prioritize the total number of ingredients or chemicals.

The pattern suggests that presence itself often carries more weight than either amount or total number when evaluating potential health risks. Still, one-third prioritize how much is present, showing that quantity remains an important consideration for a substantial share.

Americans prioritize similar factors when deciding whether a food is safe or healthy to eat.

Food safety and healthfulness are distinct concepts, but Americans may draw on overlapping cues when evaluating them. To examine potential overlap, the 2026 IFIC Food & Health Survey introduced two parallel split-sample questions. Respondents answered only one version, allowing comparisons across samples.

Factors used to decide if a food is safe or healthy are strikingly similar, with the same four selected most often in both samples. Clear expiration, “use by,” or “best before” dates lead for safety (48%) and healthfulness (46%). The absence of harmful pathogens is selected by 35% for safety and 32% for healthfulness, while the absence of chemical contaminants receives nearly identical results at 31% and 32%. Ingredients respondents understand and trust are selected by 31% for safety and 35% for healthfulness.

This alignment suggests that date labeling, absence of chemical contaminants and pathogens, and familiar ingredients inform perceptions of a food’s safety and healthfulness.

A FOCUS ON FOOD & INGREDIENT SAFETY

“Fresh” retakes the top spot in how Americans define a healthy food, while “Low in sugar” falls out of the top three for the first time.

Since 2022, the *IFIC Food & Health Survey* has asked Americans to select the top five criteria (out of a list of 20) they use to define a healthy food. Results from this year’s survey point to an evolving view. For the fourth time in the last five years, freshness leads the list of criteria Americans associate with healthfulness, while “Low in sugar” no longer appears among the top three.

Compared with 2025, Americans are more likely to connect healthfulness with “Natural” (+4%), “Fresh” (+3%), and/or “Produced in a way that is environmentally sustainable” (+1%). At the same time, fewer Americans cite several nutrient-specific attributes, including “Good source of protein” (-5%), “Low in sugar” (-5%), “Low sodium” (-4%), “Low carbohydrate” (-3%), and/or “Low in saturated fat” (-2%).

These results suggest that nutrient content remains part of how Americans assess a food’s healthfulness, but it is not the only lens.

Americans increasingly consider ingredient- and processing-related criteria for defining a healthy food.

Since 2022, the *IFIC Food & Health Survey* has asked Americans to select the top five criteria (out of a list of 20) they use to define a healthy food. In that time, the most notable shifts in the criteria Americans use to define a healthy food are related to ingredients and processing. “Limited or no artificial ingredients or preservatives” (up ten spots and +10%), “Limited number of ingredients” (up three spots and +7%), and “Minimal or no processing” (up three spots and +6%) are the three largest changes over this period.

This shift suggests that Americans are increasingly incorporating ingredient simplicity and degree of processing into their interpretation of what makes a food healthy. This does not mean traditional nutrition criteria have become irrelevant. Rather, the findings indicate that Americans’ definition is expanding beyond nutrient content alone.

A FOCUS ON FOOD & INGREDIENT SAFETY

Seven in ten Americans have heard little or nothing about state-level food labeling requirements or ingredient bans.

With numerous U.S. state legislatures proposing or adopting their own food labeling requirements and/or bans on certain ingredients or color additives, the 2026 *IFIC Food & Health Survey* measured how much Americans had heard about this state-level activity for the first time.

Public awareness appears limited. Before the survey, nearly seven in ten Americans (69%) had heard little (33%) or nothing at all (36%) about these developments. That is more than twice the share who had heard a fair amount (23%) or a great deal (8%), which together account for 31%.

Federal involvement draws broader support than state involvement in regulating food ingredients.

In addition to measuring American awareness of state-level food ingredient regulations, the 2026 *IFIC Food & Health Survey* asked who should primarily set such food policies. Food ingredients, including labeling requirements or bans on certain additives.

The largest group, 42%, favors shared regulatory responsibility between state and federal governments. Another 35% prefer one national rule set by the federal government, while 14% want each state to establish its own rules and 10% are unsure. Including those who favor shared responsibility, 77% favor some federal role and 55% favor some state role.

Federal participation is the common thread across the two most popular approaches. State-only rulemaking attracts considerably less support than either shared responsibility or a national standard. These results suggest that Americans may be more receptive to federal involvement than to states acting alone.

A FOCUS ON FOOD & INGREDIENT SAFETY

Americans have mixed views about how the safety of imported foods compares with that of foods produced or grown in the U.S.

The *IFIC Food & Health Survey* first asked Americans how safe they think imported foods are compared with foods produced or grown in the U.S. in 2011. “Not sure” was added in 2012, and the four response options have remained consistent since. After being fielded from 2012 through 2014, the question was not asked again until 2025. Together, results from 2012 through 2014 and 2025 through 2026 provide a trend across five survey years.

In 2026, 20% think imported foods are safer than U.S. foods, up eight percentage points from 12% in 2025. The share who are not sure declined from 26% to 17%. The percentages who think imported foods are less safe or about as safe remained unchanged at 32% and 30%, respectively.

Compared with 2012, the share who think imported foods are less safe is 16 percentage points lower (32% vs. 48%), while the share who think they are safer has increased tenfold (20% vs. 2%). The share who are not sure is five points lower (17% vs. 22%), while the percentage selecting about as safe has changed little (30% vs. 28%).

Americans continue to hold mixed views on how healthy imported foods are compared with U.S. foods, though more express an opinion.

For the first time, the [2025 IFIC Food & Health Survey](#) asked Americans how healthy they think imported foods are compared with foods produced or grown in the U.S. Repeating the question in 2026 provides an early look at how perceptions may be evolving.

In 2026, 35% think imported foods are about as healthy as U.S. foods, 24% think they are less healthy, and 22% think they are healthier. The remaining 19% are not sure.

Compared with 2025, Americans are more opinionated about the relative healthfulness of imported foods. The share who are not sure declined 12 percentage points from 31% to 19%. Each of the other three responses increased by three to five percentage points, with about as healthy rising from 30% to 35%, less healthy from 21% to 24%, and healthier from 19% to 22%. Together, the results show less uncertainty but no clear consensus about how imported foods compare with U.S. foods on healthfulness.

A FOCUS ON FOOD & INGREDIENT SAFETY

More than half of Americans recall seeing the “Made in the USA” label, while about half recall seeing “Product of USA.”

On January 1, 2026, the USDA FSIS voluntary labeling standard for “[Product of USA](#)” and “[Made in the USA](#)” claims took effect. Against this backdrop, the 2026 *IFIC Food & Health Survey* measured Americans’ recall of food-origin labels on food packaging for the first time.

In the past twelve months, 57% recall seeing “Made in the USA,” while 49% recall seeing “Product of USA.” State-specific labels such as “California Grown” or “Fresh from Florida” are recalled by 32%, while “Product of North America” is recalled by 13%.

Overall, 81% recall seeing at least one of the four labels assessed, while 19% recall none. National U.S.-origin labels are recalled more widely than state-specific or North American claims.

Two in three Americans are familiar with safe food handling guidelines.

Clean, Separate, Cook, and Chill are four essential safe food handling steps promoted by the United States Department of Agriculture’s Food Safety and Inspection Service (USDA FSIS). Collectively dubbed the “[Core Four](#),” these practices were included in familiarity questions in the *IFIC Food & Health Survey* in 2024 and again in 2026.

Familiarity in 2026 is relatively broad but more often moderate than strong. Overall, 65% report at least some familiarity with the Core Four, including 42% who are somewhat familiar and 23% who are very familiar. Another 30% are not familiar with the guidelines, a larger share than those who are very familiar, while 5% are not sure.

Taken together, the results suggest that safe food handling communications should assume that most Americans are not fully familiar with all four practices.

A FOCUS ON FOOD & INGREDIENT SAFETY

Fewer Americans report regularly following recommended food safety practices than in 2016.

Food safety practices were first measured in the [2008 IFIC Food & Health Survey](#) and were most recently assessed in the [2016 IFIC Food & Health Survey](#) before returning in 2026.

Hand washing remains the most frequently reported food safety practice but the share doing so regularly has declined from 97% in 2013 to 83% in 2016 and 75% in 2026. Compared with 2016, smaller shares also report regularly washing cutting boards (-10%), cooking to safe internal temperatures (-9%), separating raw meat, poultry, and seafood from ready-to-eat foods (-8%), safely defrosting foods in the fridge or microwave (-7%) properly storing leftovers within two hours (-6%), and using different or freshly cleaned boards for raw products and produce (-5%). Regular food thermometer use is the only established practice to increase, rising five percentage points from 30% to 35%.

A new 2026 item finds that 20% regularly use an air fryer to cook raw, stuffed breaded chicken breast products. The United States Department of Agriculture's Food Safety and Inspection Service (USDA FSIS) [advises against](#) cooking these products in air fryers and recommends following manufacturer instructions.

Six in ten Americans say they have seen the Safe Handling Instructions label on food products, down seven percentage points from 2015.

In the [2015 IFIC Food & Health Survey](#), Americans were asked whether they had seen the United States Department of Agriculture's Food Safety and Inspection Service (USDA FSIS) Safe Food Handling Instructions [label](#). Those who had seen the label were also asked whether they had used its information while preparing food for cooking. The questions were asked again in 2026 after being omitted from the previous 10 surveys.

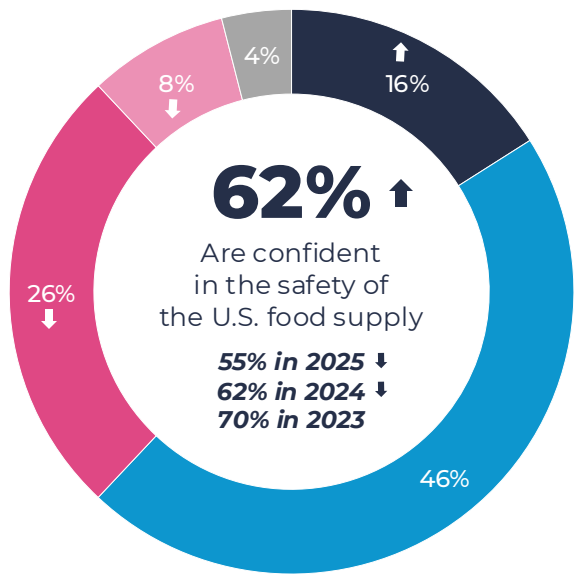
In 2026, 59% say they have seen the label, down from 67% in 2015. Among those who have seen it, 83% report using the information while preparing food, up from 76% in 2015.

Together, the findings suggest that the label may currently reach a smaller share of Americans, while its information remains widely used among those who recall seeing it.

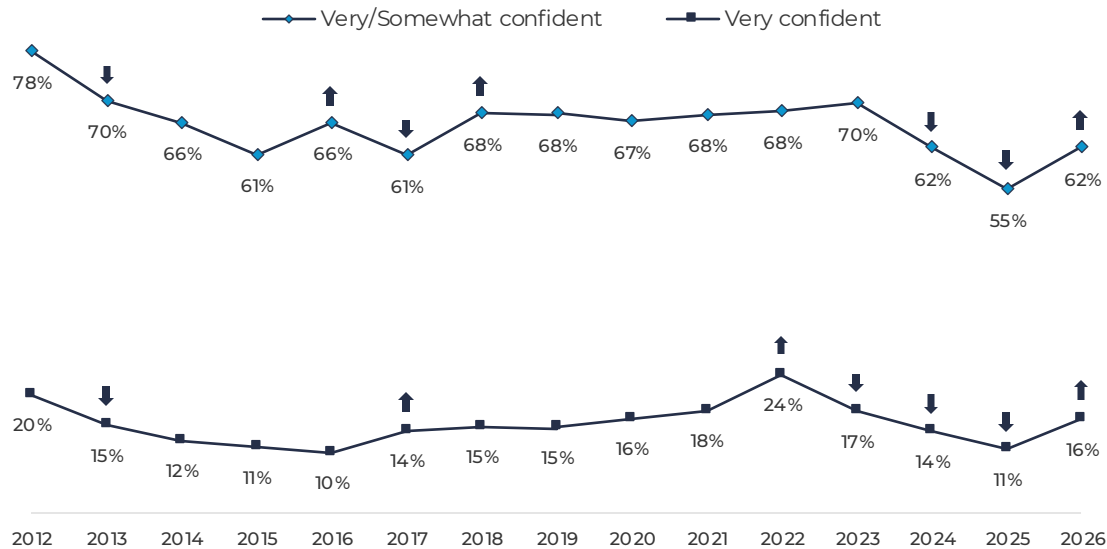
Americans' confidence in the safety of the U.S. food supply rebounds sharply from last year's record low.

Overall confidence rose seven percentage points, from 55% in 2025 to 62% in 2026, matching the largest year-over-year gain, recorded in 2018. The share who are very confident accounted for most of the increase, rising from 11% to 16%.

Confidence In The Safety Of The U.S. Food Supply



- Very confident
- Somewhat confident
- Not too confident
- Not at all confident
- Not sure



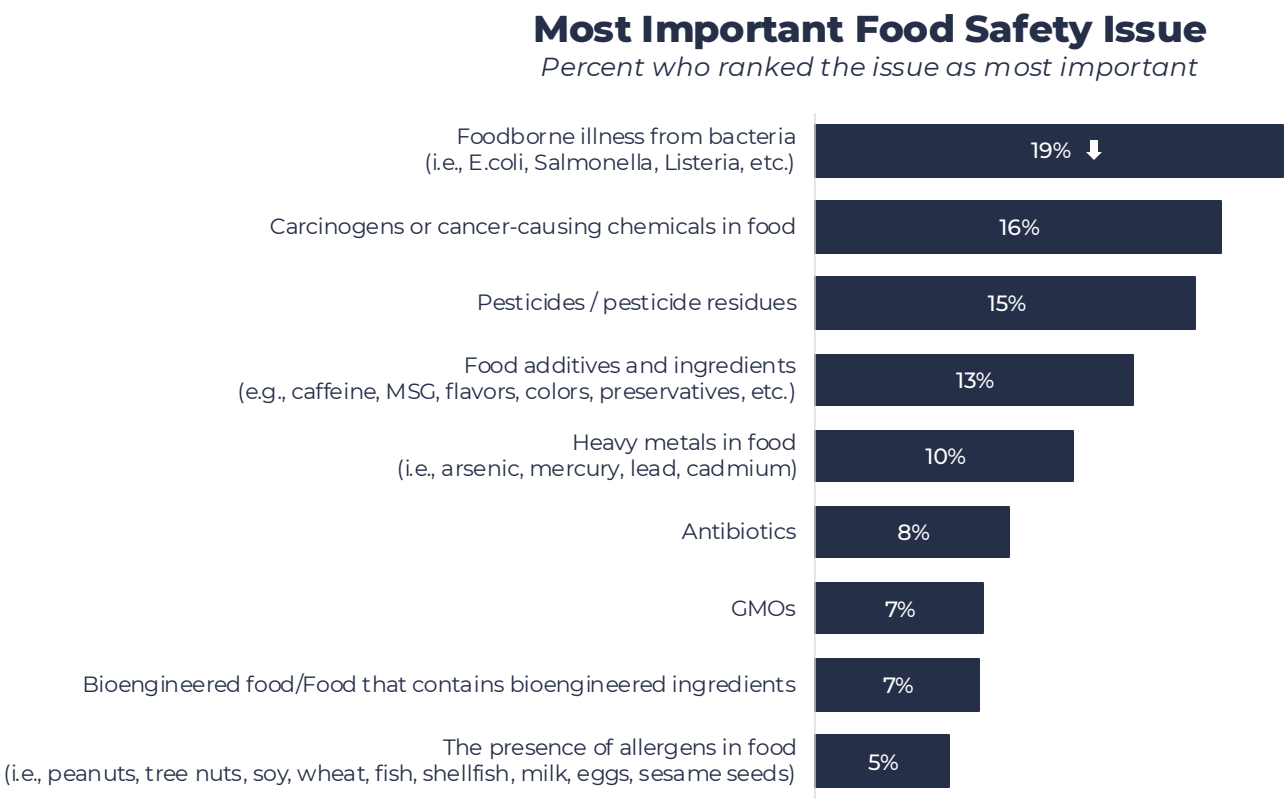
15-year trend
↓ 62% in 2026
vs. 78% in 2012

10-year trend
62% in 2026
vs. 61% in 2017

5-year trend
↓ 62% in 2026
vs. 68% in 2022

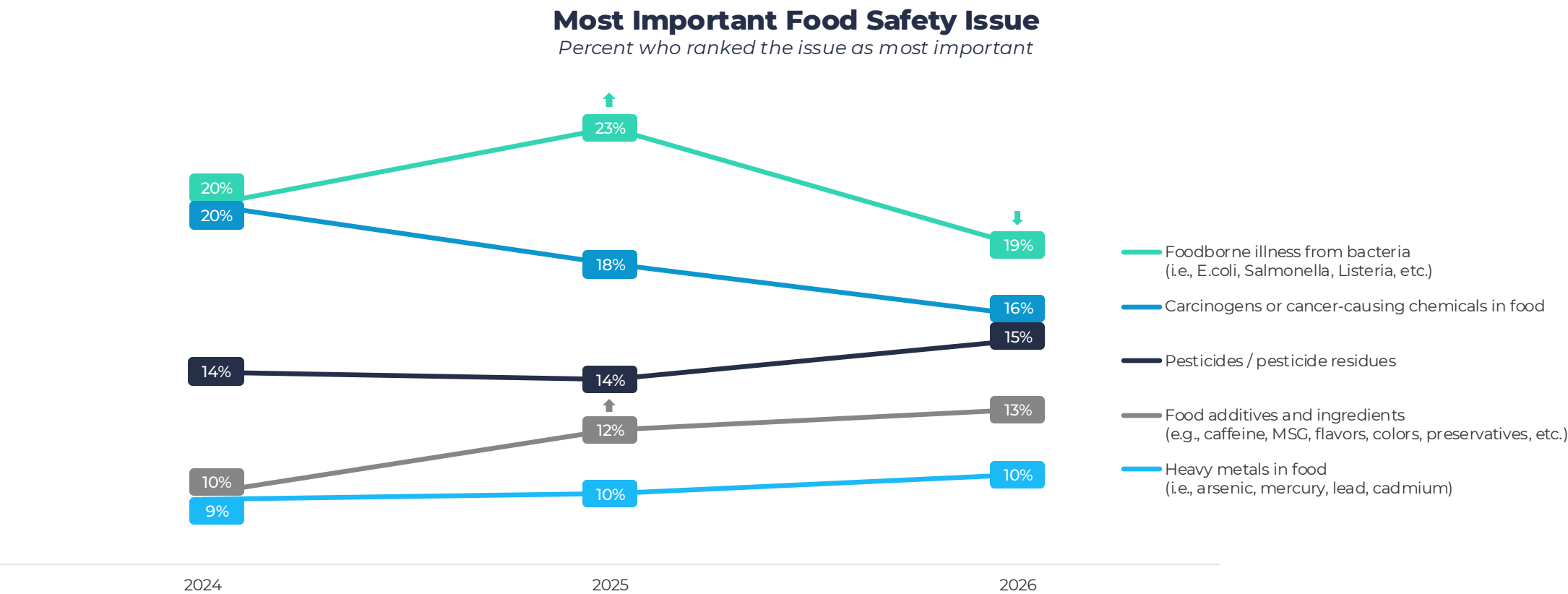
Foodborne illness remains the food safety issue Americans most often rank as most important.

The share of Americans ranking foodborne illness as their top food safety issue declined from 23% in 2025 to 19% this year. Rounding out the top five are carcinogens (16%), pesticides (15%), food additives and ingredients (13%), and heavy metals (10%).



Foodborne illness remains the food safety issue Americans most often rank as most important.

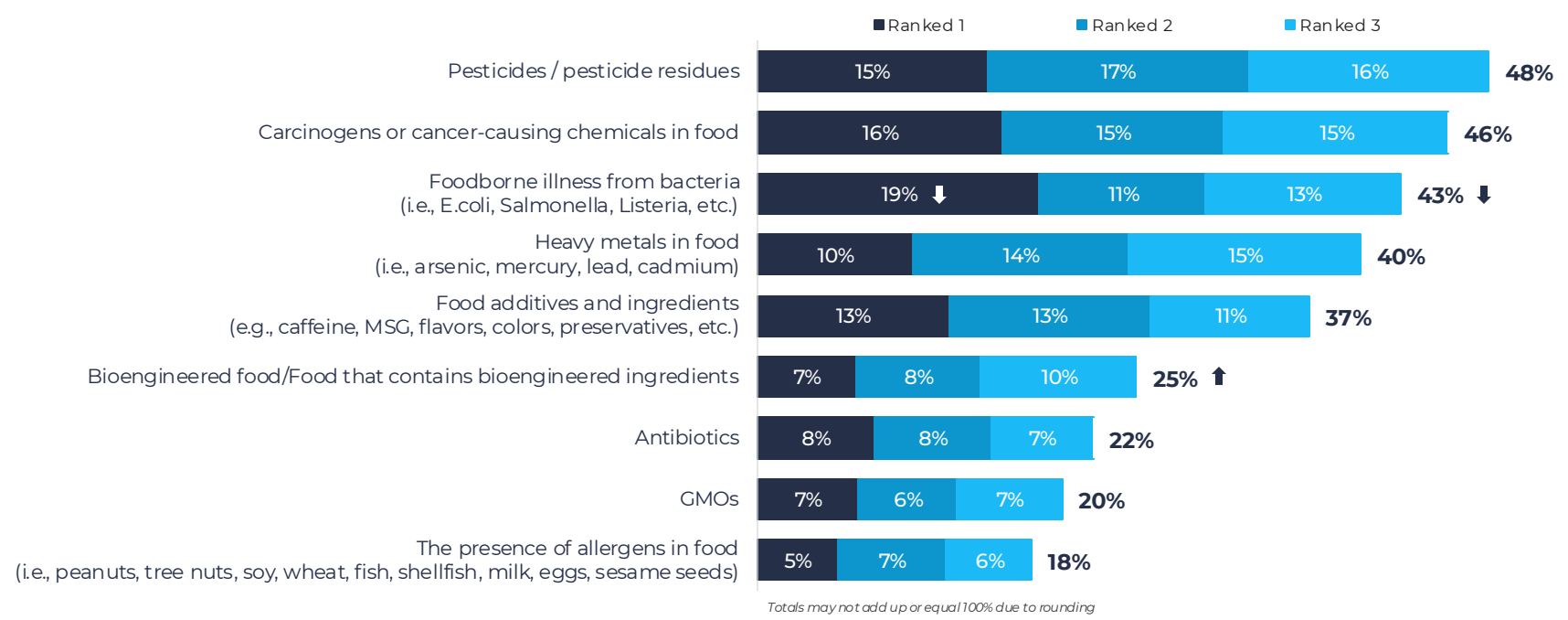
The share of Americans ranking foodborne illness as their top food safety issue declined from 23% in 2025 to 19% this year. Rounding out the top five are carcinogens (16%), pesticides (15%), food additives and ingredients (13%), and heavy metals (10%). Compared with 2024, the share ranking carcinogens first has fallen from 20% to 16%, while food additives and ingredients has risen from 10% to 13%.



Pesticides, carcinogens, and foodborne illness remain Americans' leading food safety issues.

Nearly half of Americans (48%) rank pesticides among their top three food safety issues, similar to the 46% reported in both 2024 and 2025. At least four in ten rank carcinogens (46%), foodborne illness (43%), or heavy metals (40%) among their top three. Compared with 2025, fewer rank foodborne illness, down from 50%, while more rank bioengineered food, up from 21%.

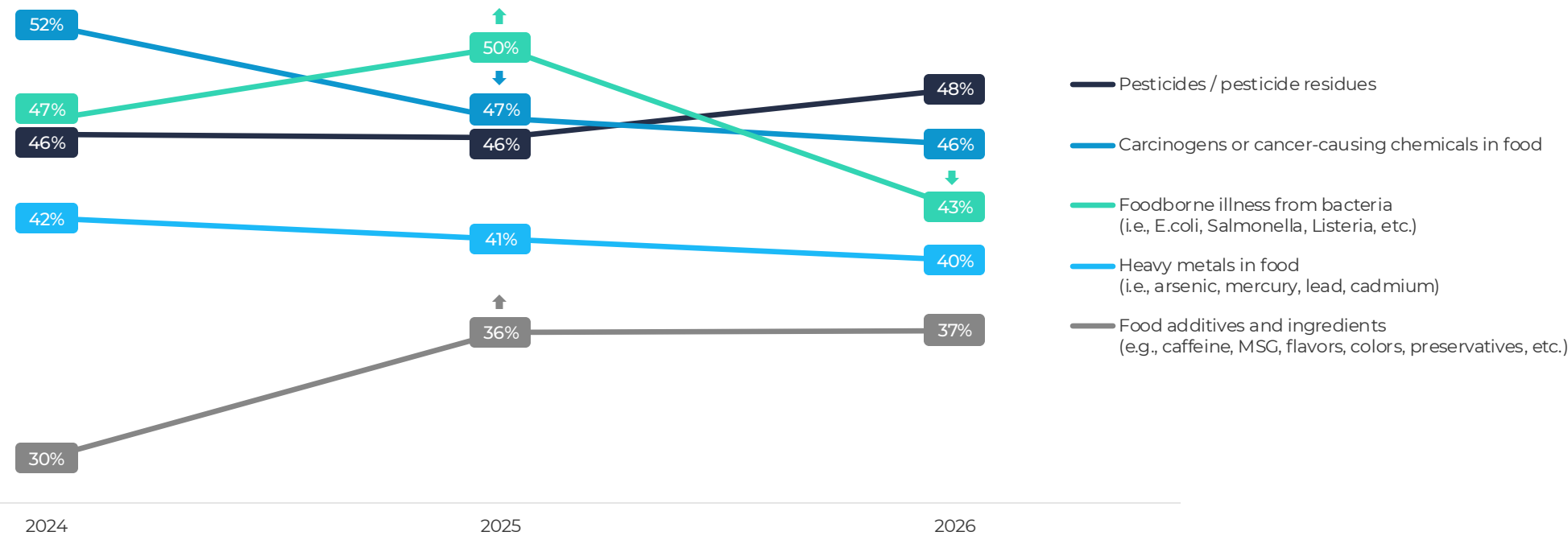
Top Three Most Important Food Safety Issues
Percent who ranked the issue in their top three



Pesticides, carcinogens, and foodborne illness remain Americans' leading food safety issues.

Compared with 2024, fewer Americans rank carcinogens (46%, down from 52%) or foodborne illness (43%, down from 47%) among their top three food safety issues, while more rank food additives and ingredients (37%, up from 30%).

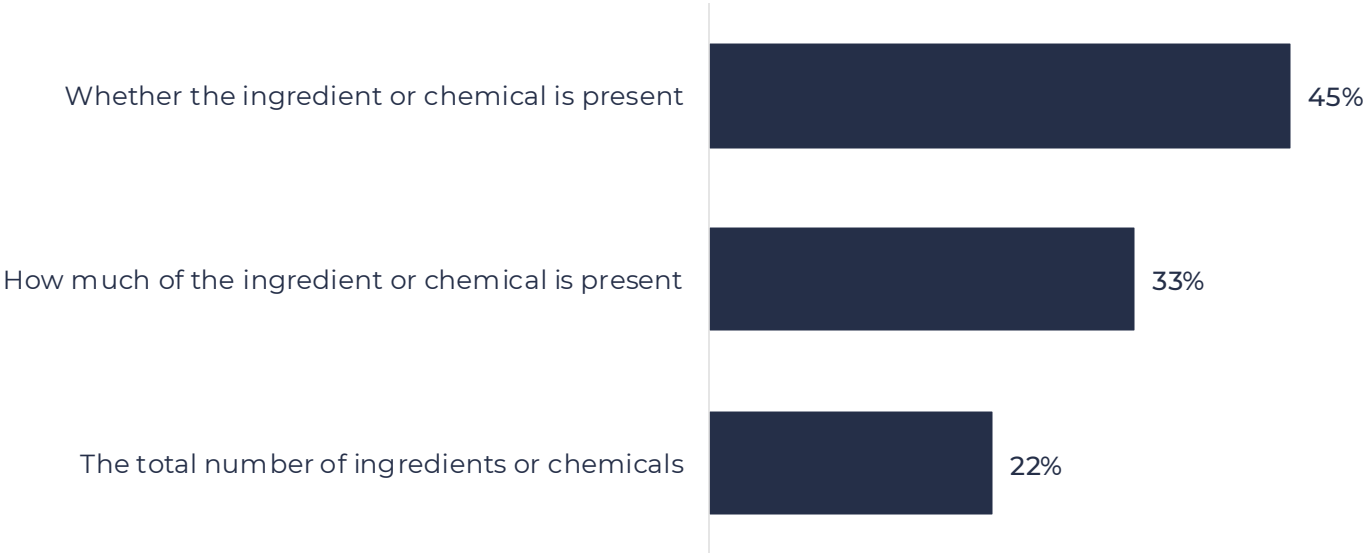
Top Three Most Important Food Safety Issues
Percent who ranked the issue in their top three



Among those ranking additives, ingredients, or chemicals as top food safety issues, more than four in ten prioritize the presence of an ingredient or chemical over its amount or the total number present.

Among Americans who rank additives, ingredients, or chemicals as top food safety issues, 45% prioritize whether one is present when assessing potential health risk, compared with 33% who prioritize the amount and 22% the total number.

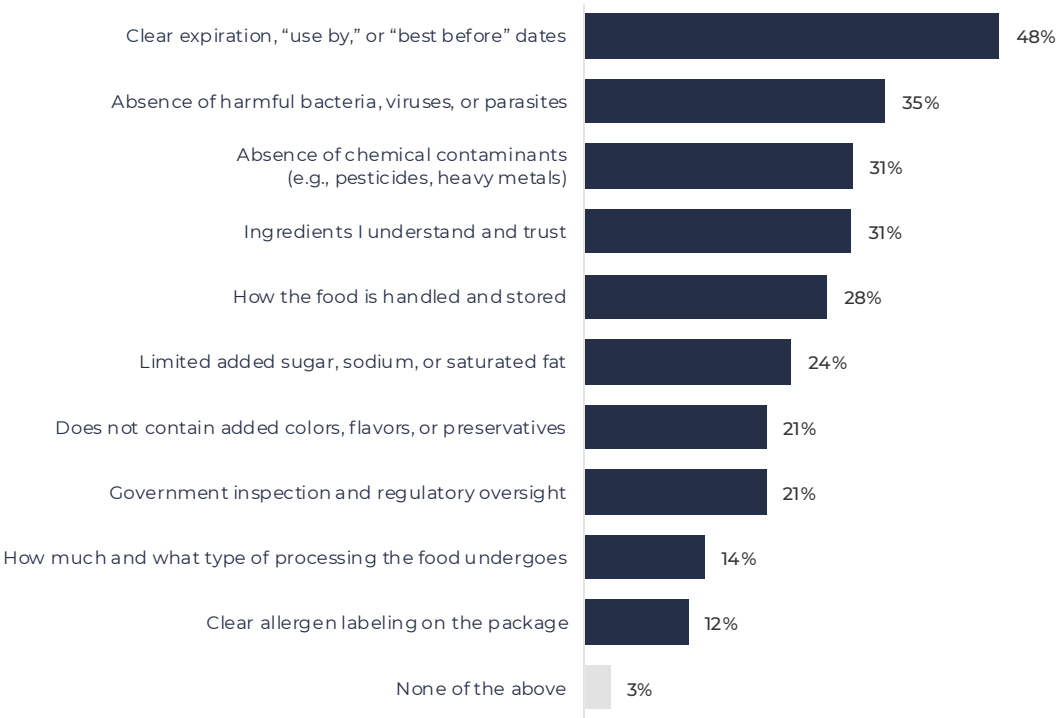
Most Important When Deciding If A Food Or Beverage Poses A Health Risk
If ranked food additives/ingredients, heavy metals, pesticides, and/or carcinogens as a top three food safety issue



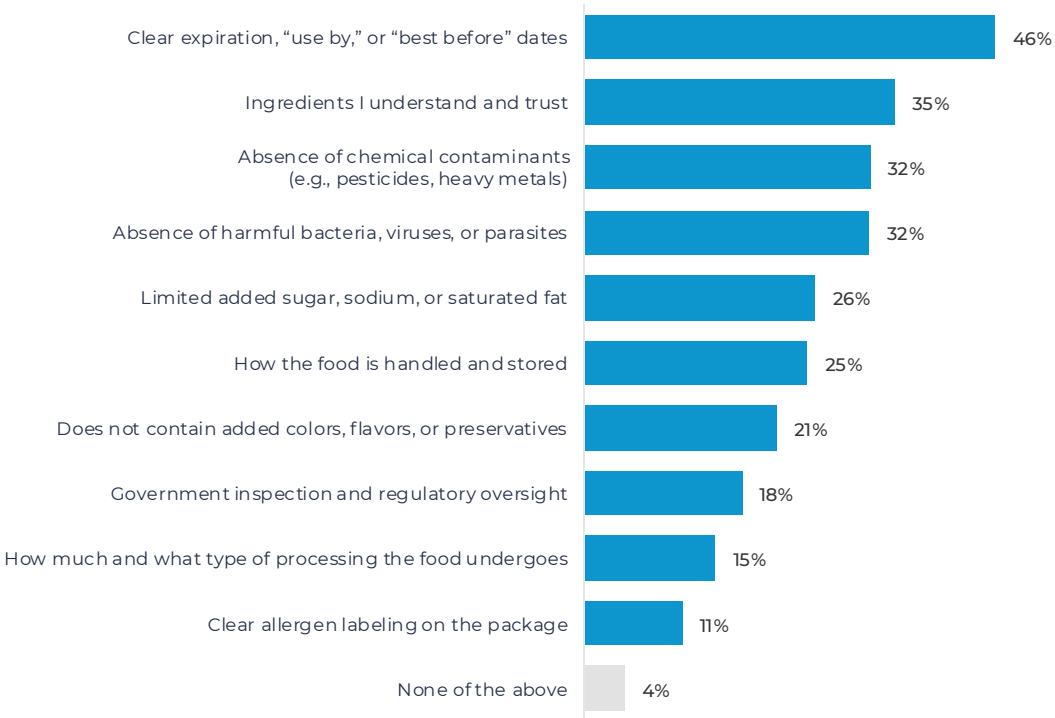
Americans prioritize similar factors when deciding whether a food is safe or healthy to eat.

The same four factors are selected most often when deciding whether a food is safe or healthy to eat, led by clear expiration dates for both safety (48%) and healthfulness (46%). More than three in ten also select the absence of harmful pathogens (35% safety, 32% healthfulness), the absence of chemical contaminants (31%, 32%), and ingredients they understand and trust (31%, 35%).

Factors For Deciding If Food Is Safe



Factors For Deciding If Food Is Healthy

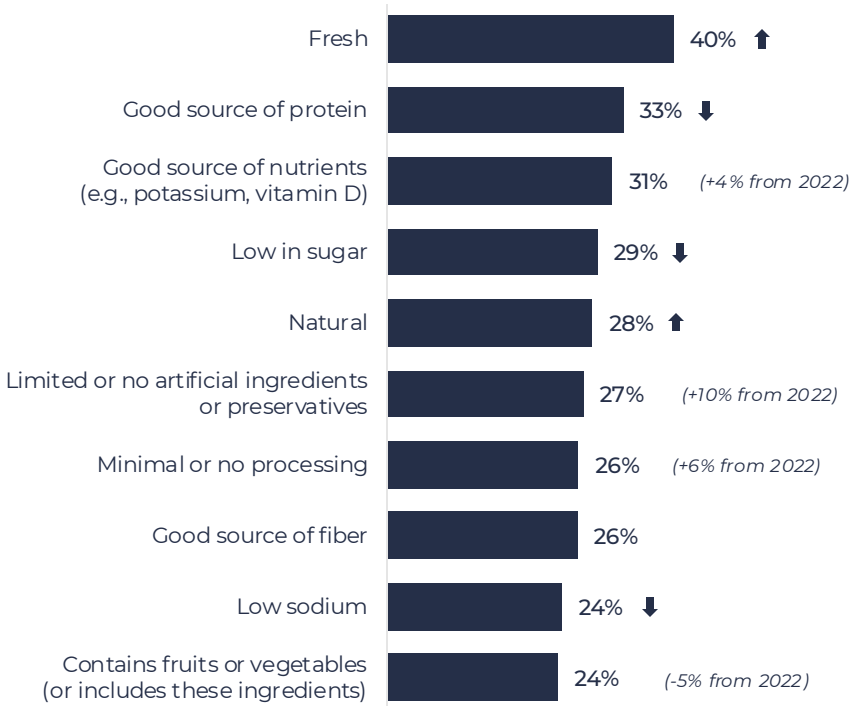


“Fresh” retakes the top spot in how Americans define a healthy food, while “Low in sugar” falls out of the top three for the first time.

Compared with 2025, more Americans use “Natural,” “Fresh,” and/or “Produced in a way that is environmentally sustainable” to define a healthy food. Fewer use “Good source of protein,” “Low in sugar,” “Low sodium,” “Low carbohydrate,” and/or “Low in saturated fat.” Ingredient- and processing-related considerations have risen the most since 2022.

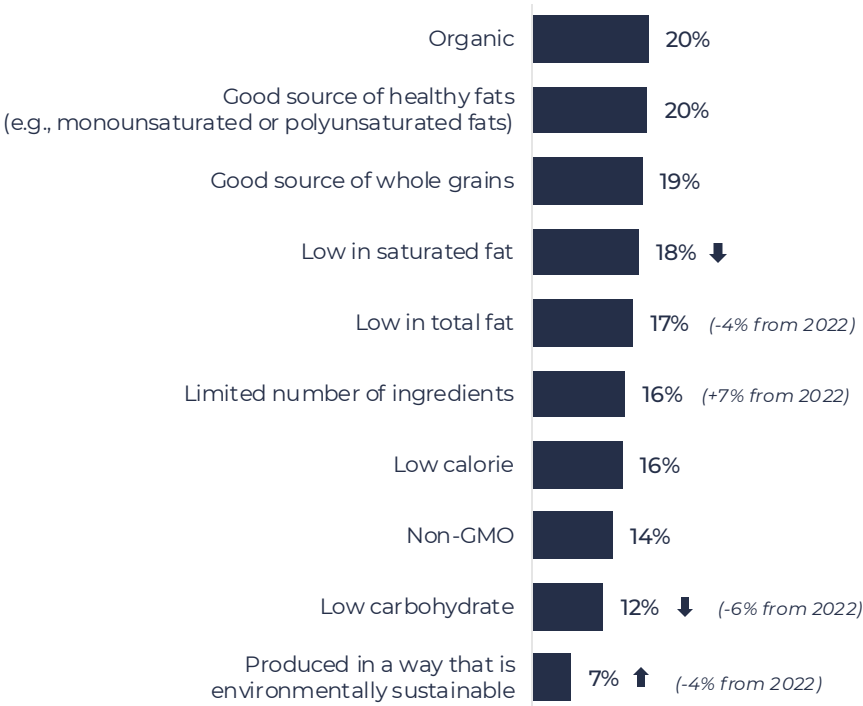
Criteria Americans Use To Define A Healthy Food

Top 10



Criteria Americans Use To Define A Healthy Food

Bottom 10

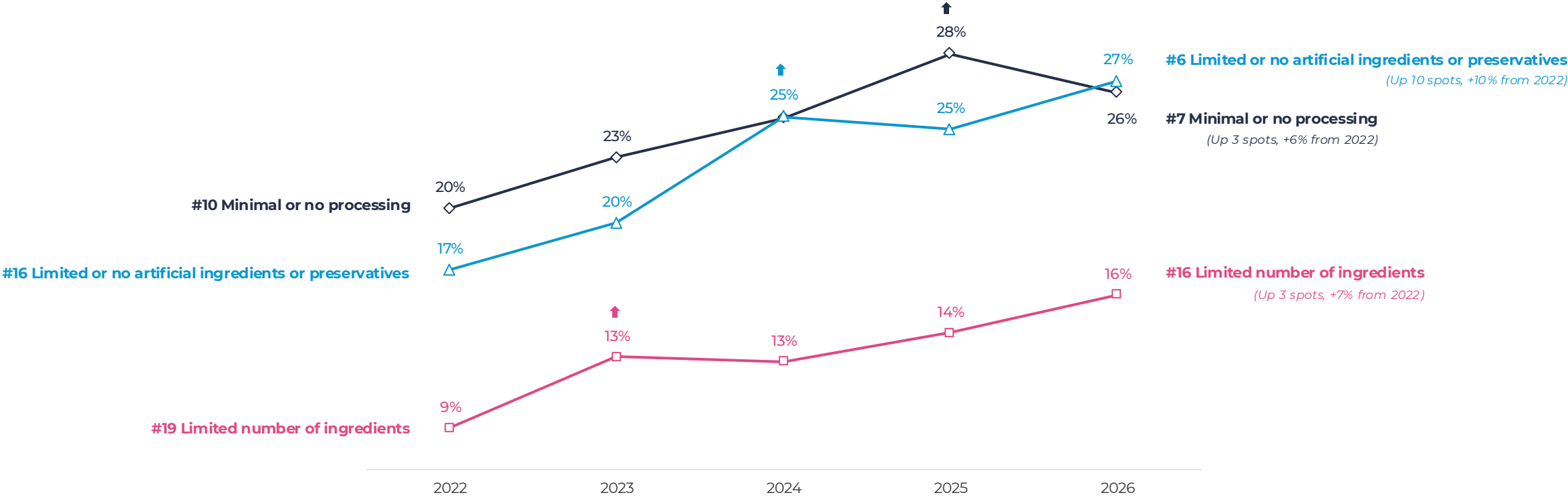


Americans increasingly consider ingredient- and processing-related criteria for defining a healthy food.

Compared to 2022, the three biggest changes among criteria Americans use to define a healthy food are “Limited or no artificial ingredients or preservatives” (+10%), “Limited number of ingredients” (+7%), and “Minimal or no processing” (+6%).

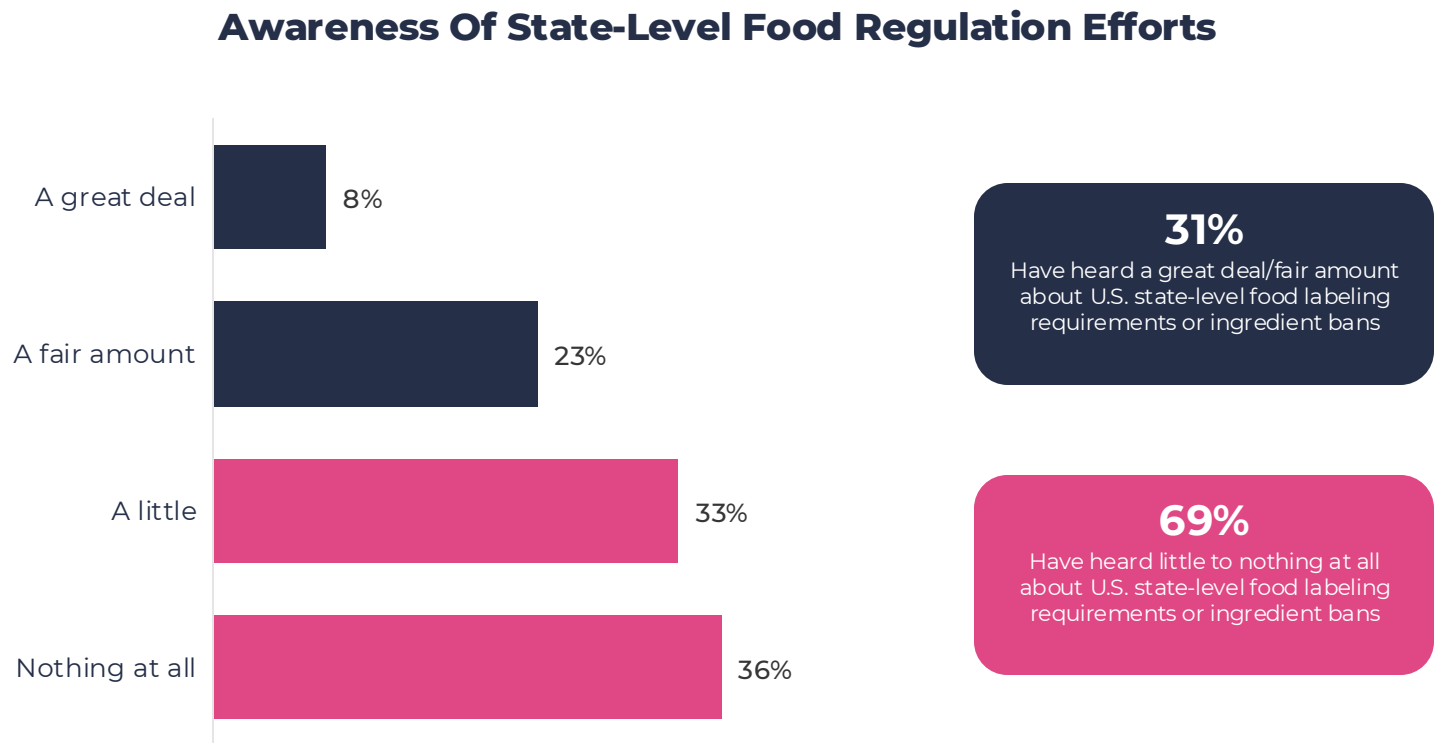
Ingredient- & Processing-Related Criteria Used To Define A Healthy Food

Percent selecting as a top 5 criteria to define a healthy food



Seven in ten Americans have heard little or nothing about state-level food labeling requirements or ingredient bans.

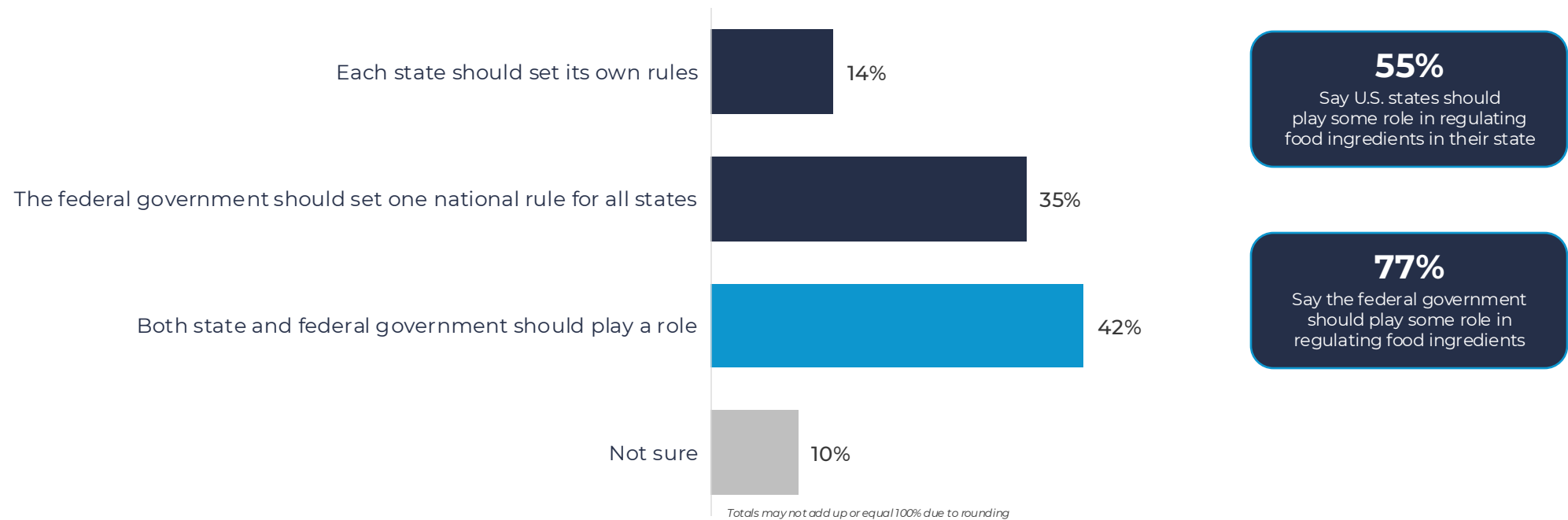
While 31% have heard a great deal (8%) or fair amount (23%) about U.S. states passing or proposing food labeling requirements or ingredient bans, 69% have heard little (33%) or nothing at all (36%).



Federal involvement draws broader support than state involvement in regulating food ingredients.

More than three in four Americans (77%) favor some federal role in setting food ingredient regulations, such as labeling requirements or bans on certain additives, compared with 55% who favor some state role. These groups overlap, with 42% favoring shared state and federal responsibility, while 35% prefer one national rule and 14% prefer each state to set its own rules.

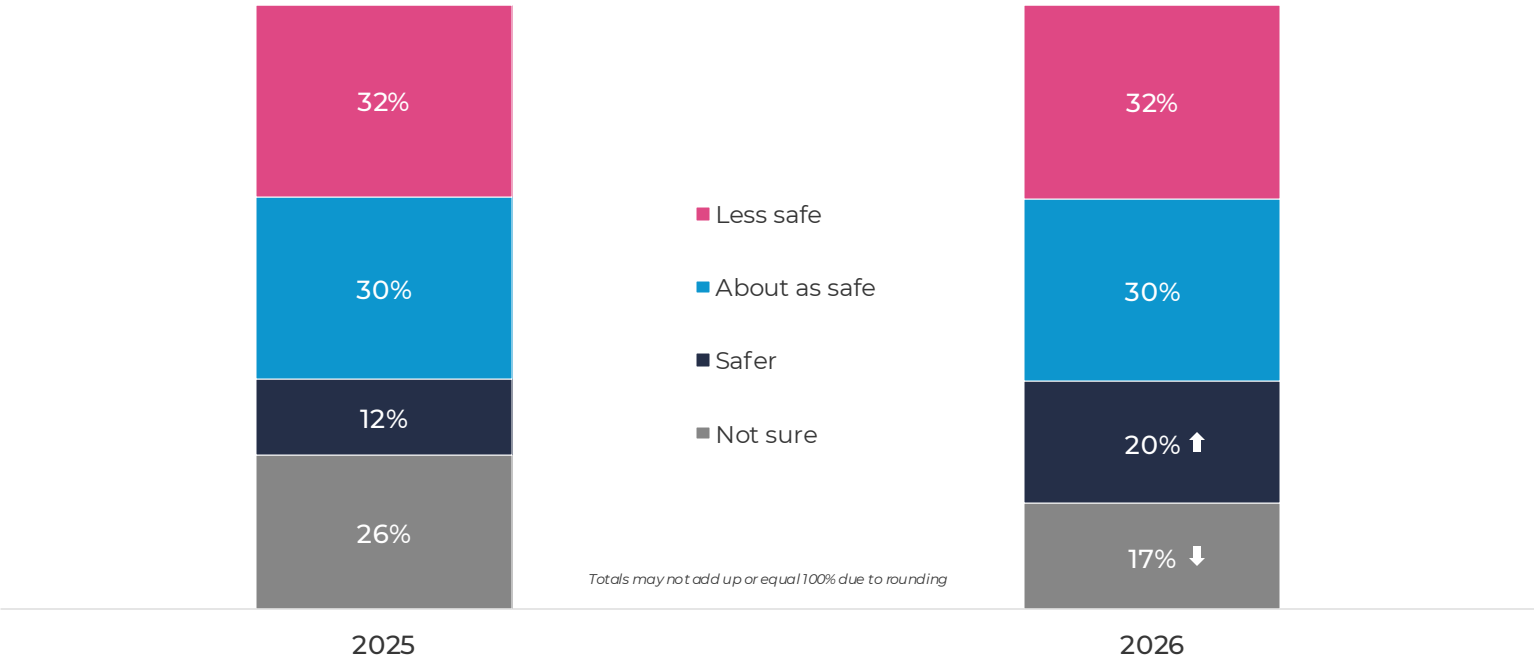
Perceived Responsibility For Regulating Food Ingredients



Americans have mixed views about how the safety of imported foods compares with that of foods produced or grown in the U.S.

One in three Americans (32%) think imported foods are less safe than U.S. foods, while 30% think they are about as safe, 20% think they are safer, and 17% are unsure. Compared with 2025, the share who think imported foods are safer rose from 12% to 20%, while uncertainty fell from 26% to 17%.

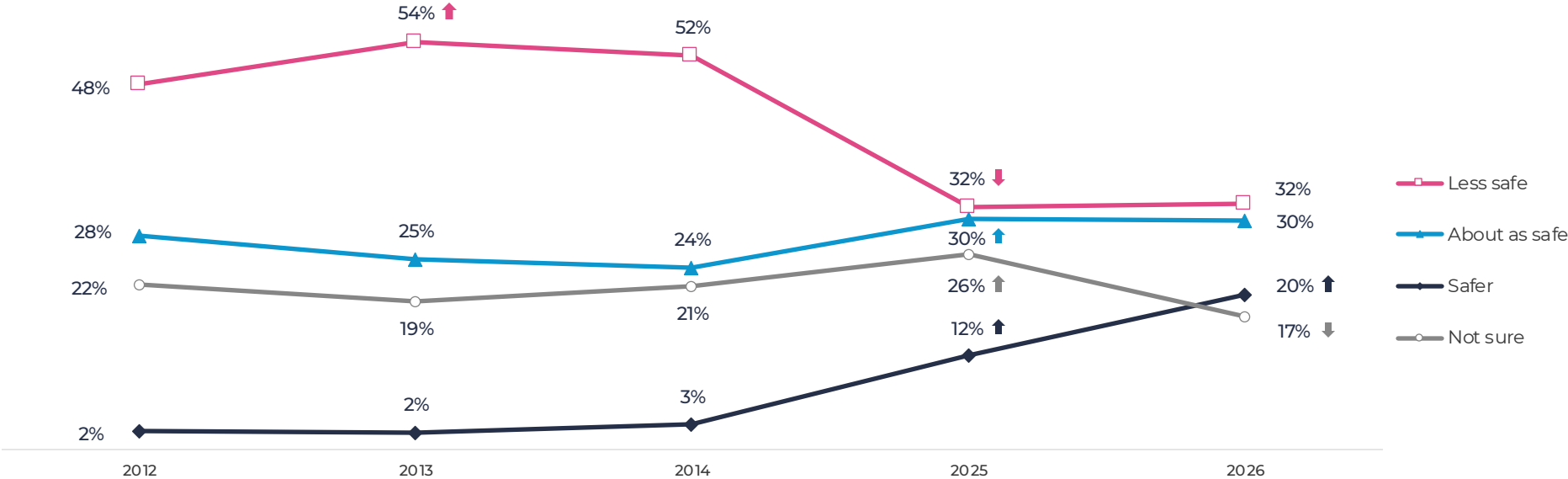
Perceived Safety Of Imported Foods Vs. Domestic Foods



Americans have mixed views about how the safety of imported foods compares with that of foods produced or grown in the U.S.

One in three Americans (32%) think imported foods are less safe than U.S. foods, while 30% think they are about as safe, 20% think they are safer, and 17% are unsure. Since 2012, the share who think imported foods are less safe has declined from 48% to 32%, while the share who think they are safer has increased tenfold, from 2% to 20%. The share who are not sure also declined from 22% to 17%.

Perceived Safety Of Imported Foods Vs. Domestic Foods

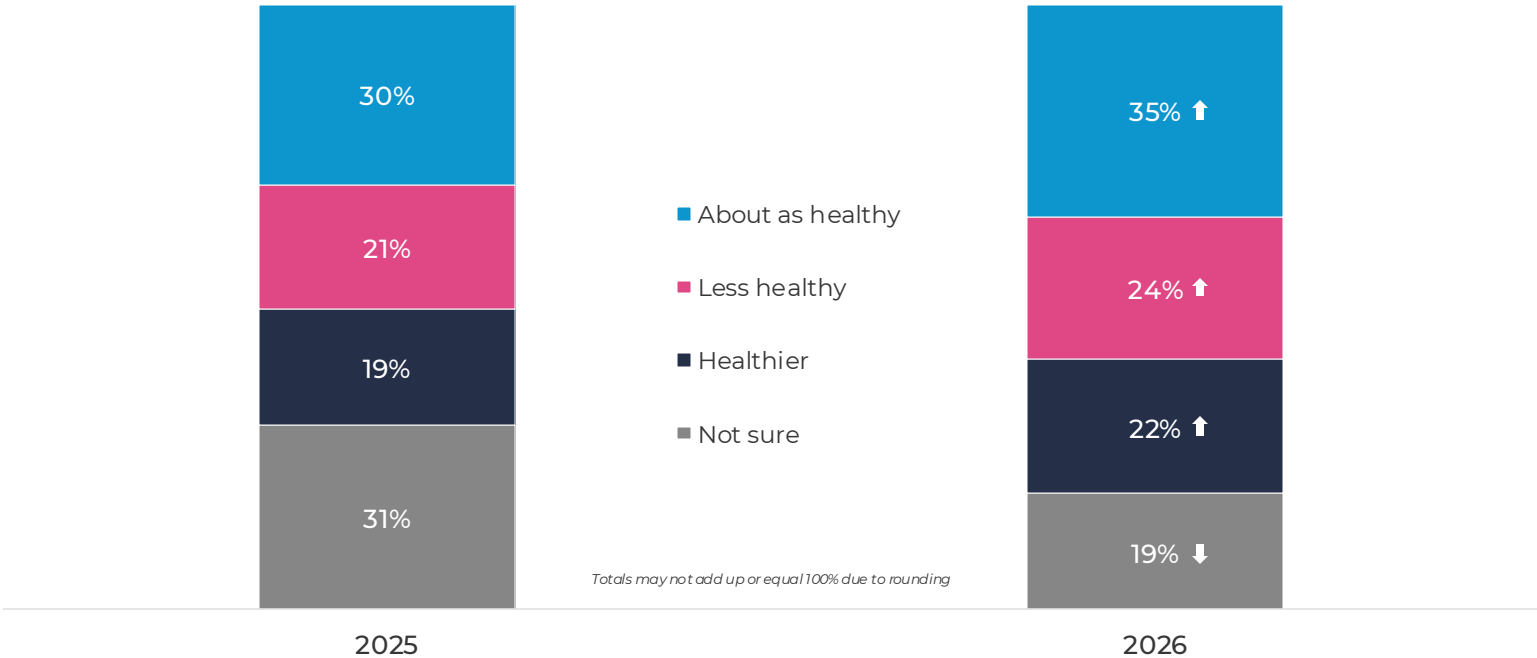


Totals may not add up or equal 100% due to rounding

Americans continue to hold mixed views on how healthy imported foods are compared with U.S. foods, though more express an opinion.

About one in three Americans (35%) think imported foods are about as healthy as foods produced or grown in the U.S., while one in four think they are less healthy (24%) or healthier (22%). Compared with 2025, Americans are more opinionated, with the share who are not sure falling from 31% to 19% and the other three responses each rising by three to five percentage points.

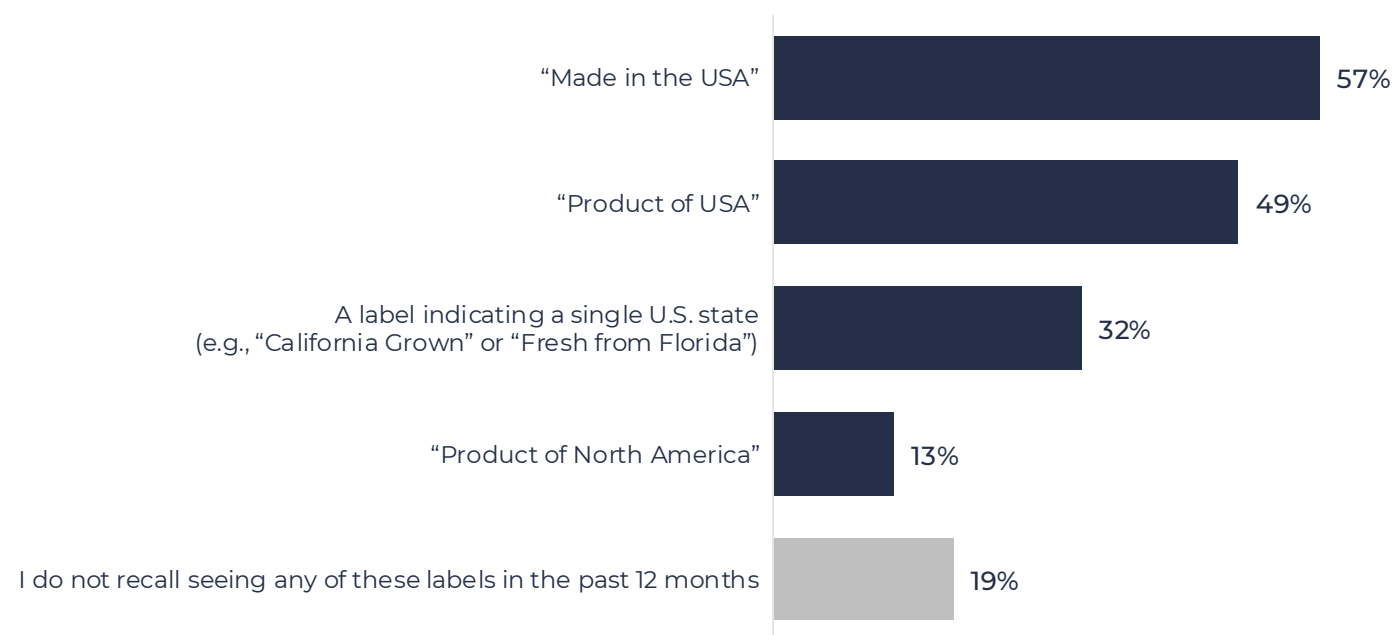
Perceived Healthfulness Of Imported Foods Vs. Domestic Foods



More than half of Americans recall seeing the “Made in the USA” label, while about half recall seeing “Product of USA.”

In the past twelve months, Americans more often recall seeing “Made in the USA” (57%) or “Product of USA” (49%) labels than a state-specific label (32%) or “Product of North America” (13%). Nearly two in ten (19%) do not recall seeing any of these labels.

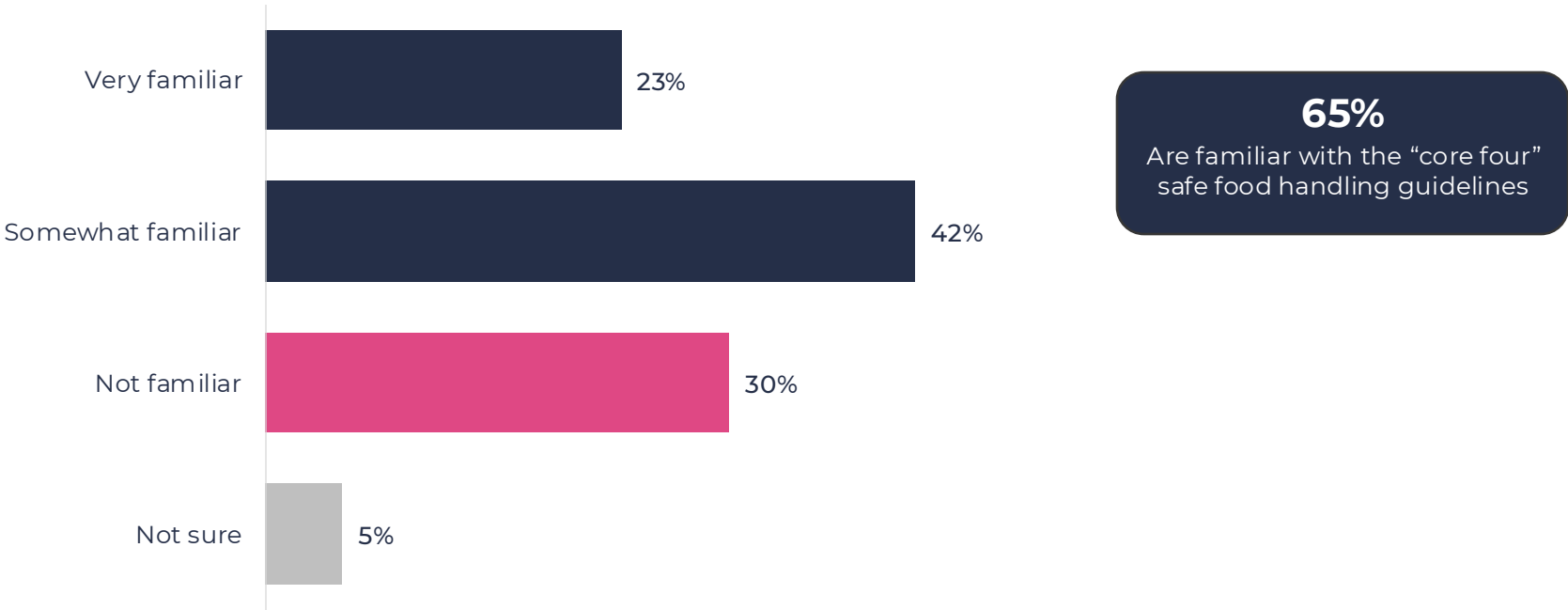
Food Origin Labels Seen On Food Packaging In The Past 12 Months



Two in three Americans are familiar with safe food handling guidelines.

Although 65% report at least some familiarity with the “Core Four” safe food handling principles, more are not familiar with them (30%) than very familiar (23%).

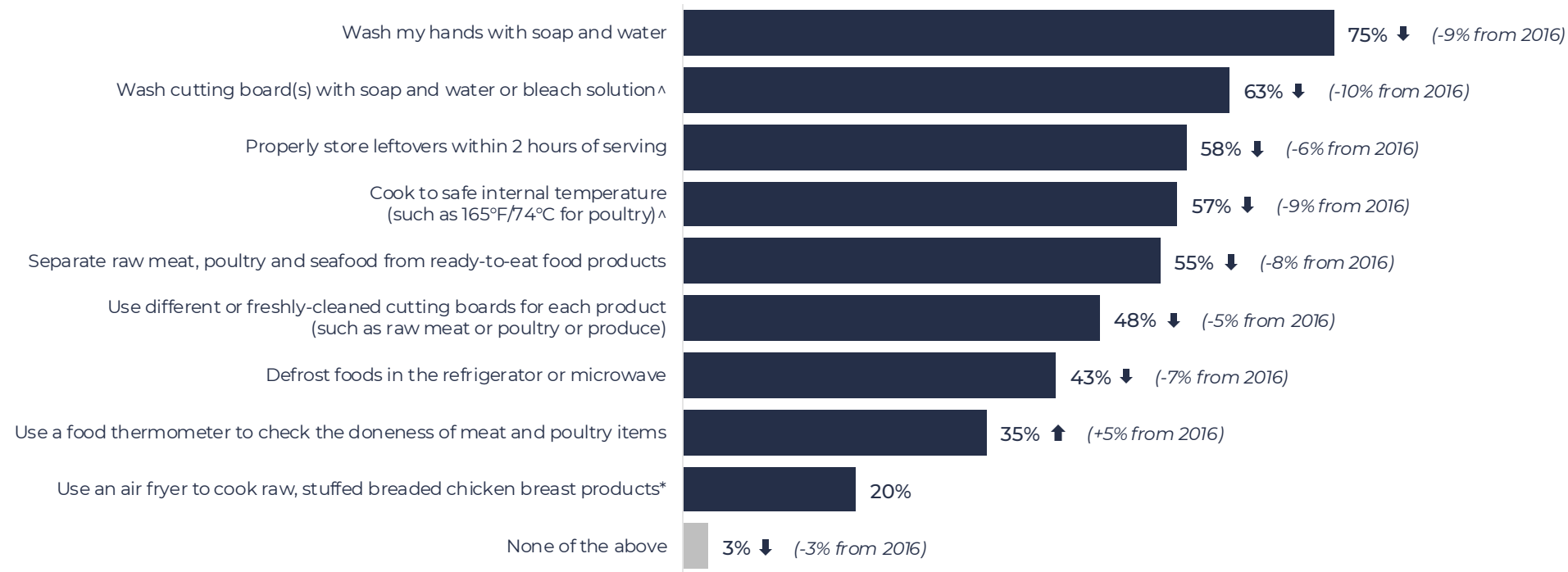
Familiarity With The “Core Four” Safe Food Handling Guidelines: Clean, Separate, Cook, Chill



Fewer Americans report regularly following recommended food safety practices than in 2016.

Hand washing remains the most common food safety practice, though the share who report doing so regularly declined from 97% in 2013 to 83% in 2016 and 75% this year. Among practices also measured in 2016, food thermometer use was the only one to increase, from 30% to 35%.

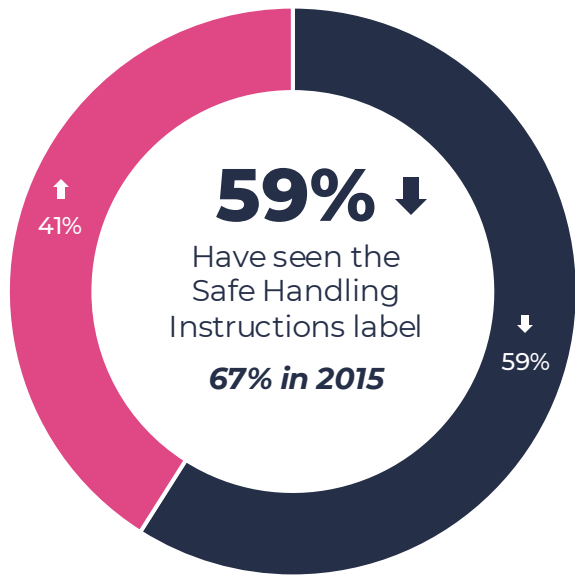
Actions Taken When Cooking, Preparing, And Consuming Food



Six in ten Americans say they have seen the Safe Handling Instructions label on food products, down seven percentage points from 2015.

Fewer Americans say they have seen the Safe Handling Instructions label in 2026 than in 2015 (59% vs. 67%). Among those who have seen it, reported use of the information while preparing food for cooking increased from 76% to 83%.

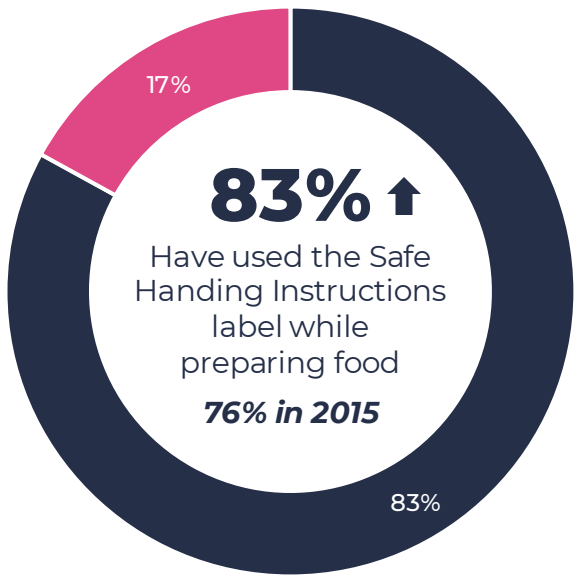
Has Seen The Safe Handling Instructions Label



- Yes
- No

Has Used The Safe Handling Instructions Label

Among those who have seen the Safe Handling Instructions label





DEMOGRAPHICS

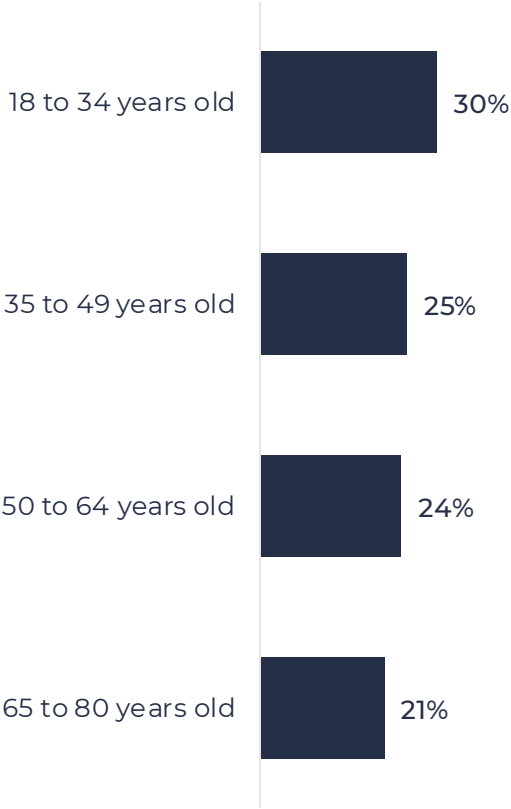


FOOD & HEALTH
SURVEY

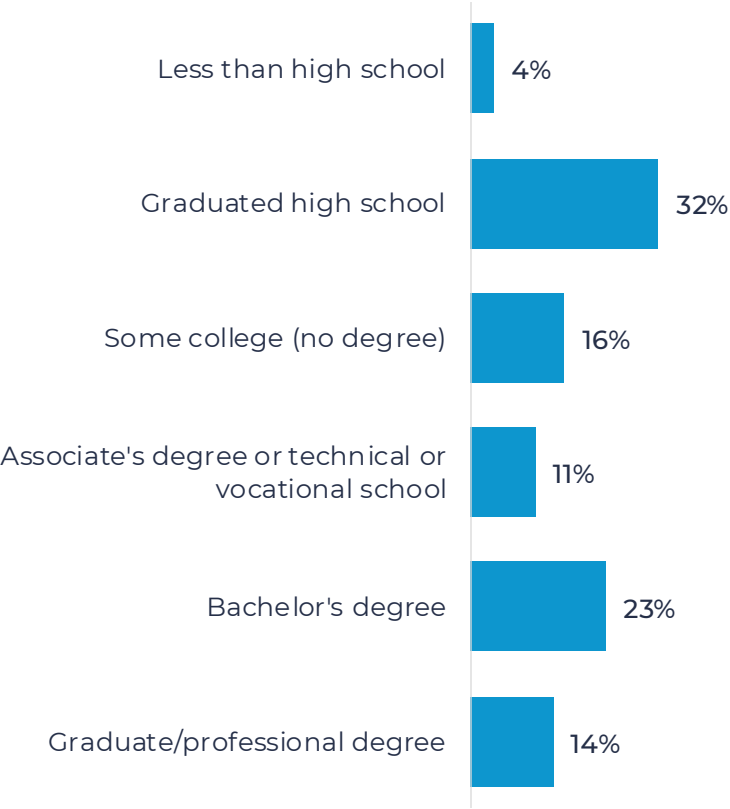


DEMOGRAPHICS

AGE

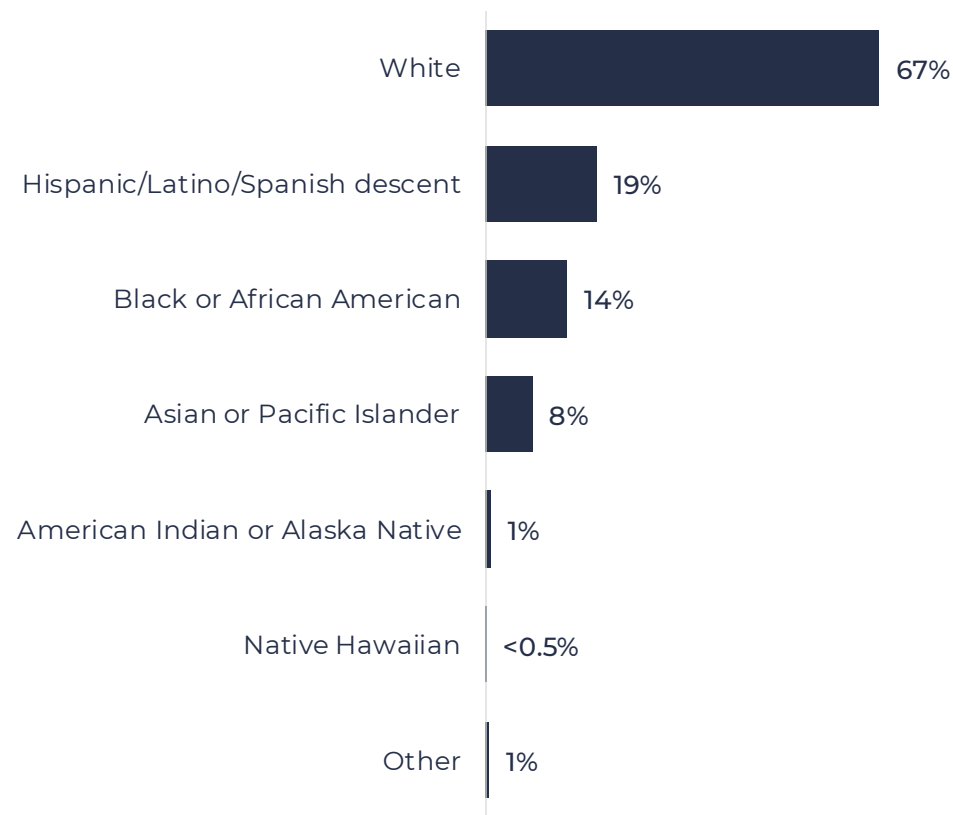


EDUCATION

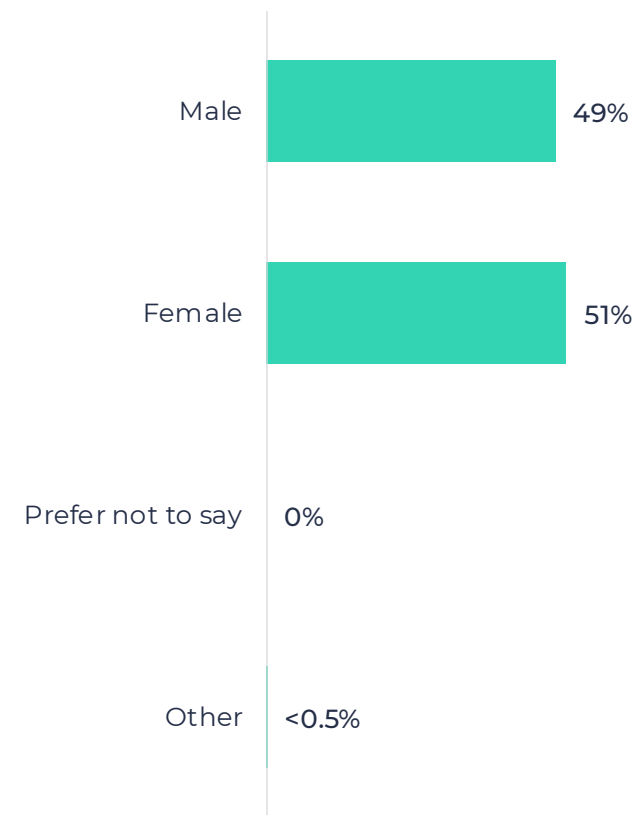


DEMOGRAPHICS

RACE/ETHNICITY

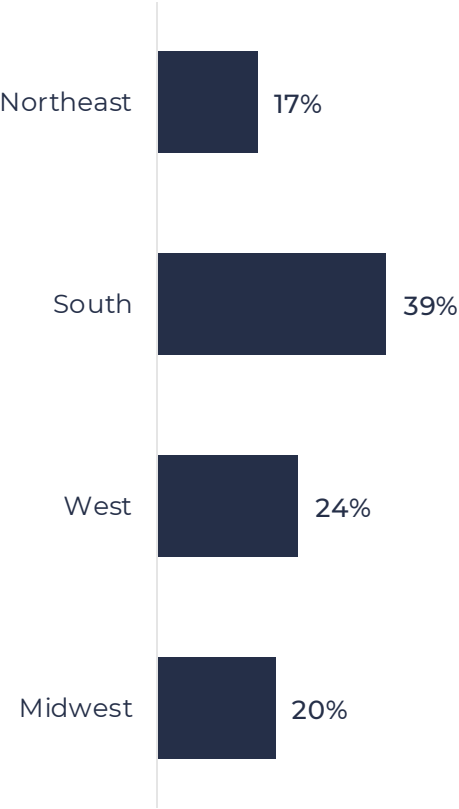


GENDER

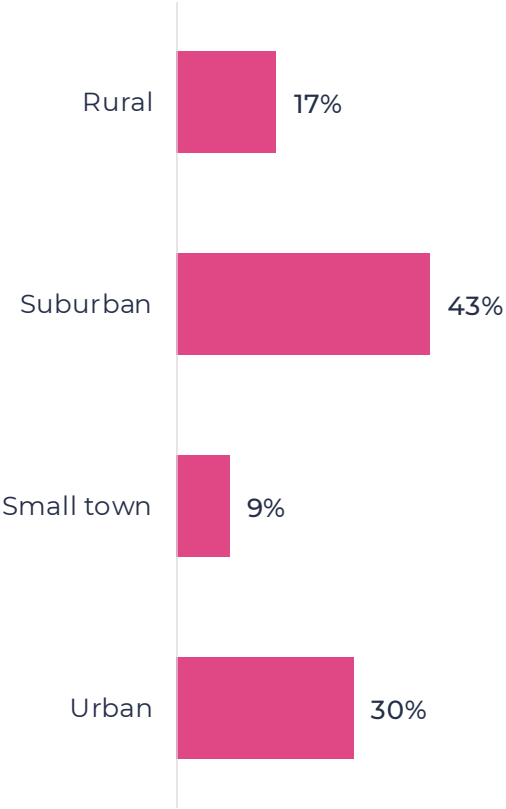


DEMOGRAPHICS

REGION

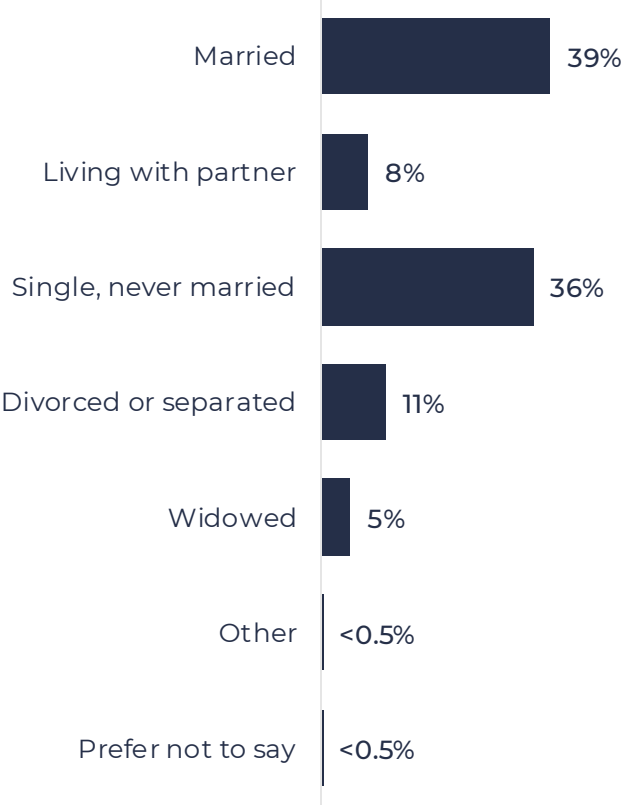


COMMUNITY

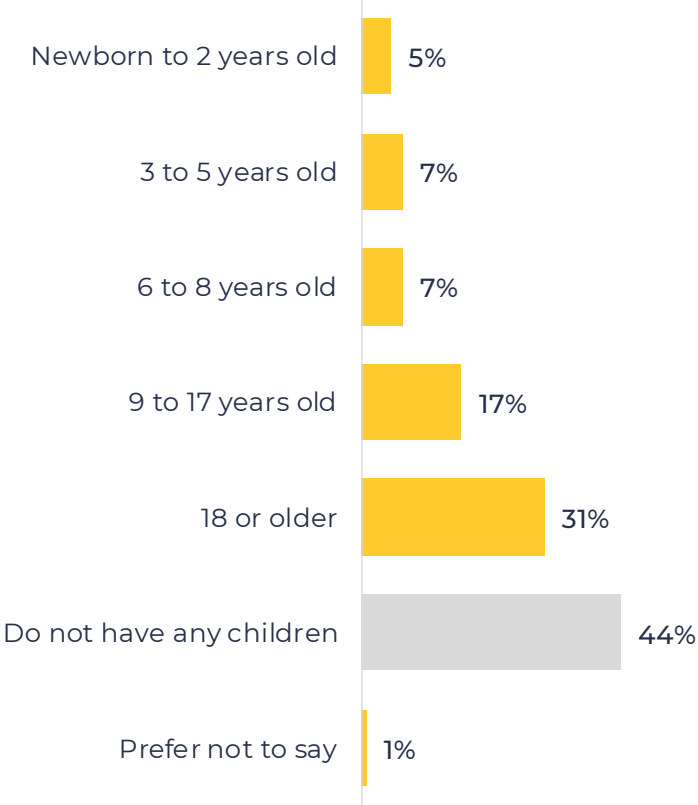


DEMOGRAPHICS

MARITAL STATUS

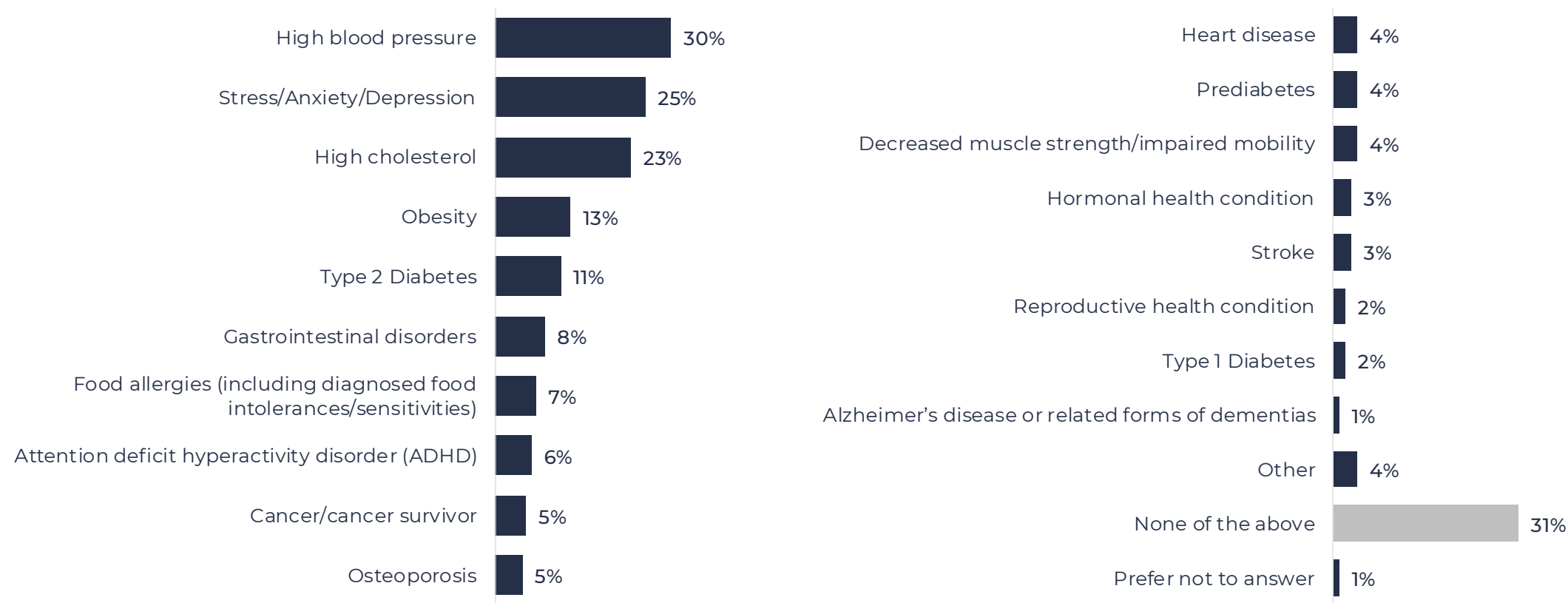


CHILDREN



DEMOGRAPHICS

MEDICAL CONDITIONS

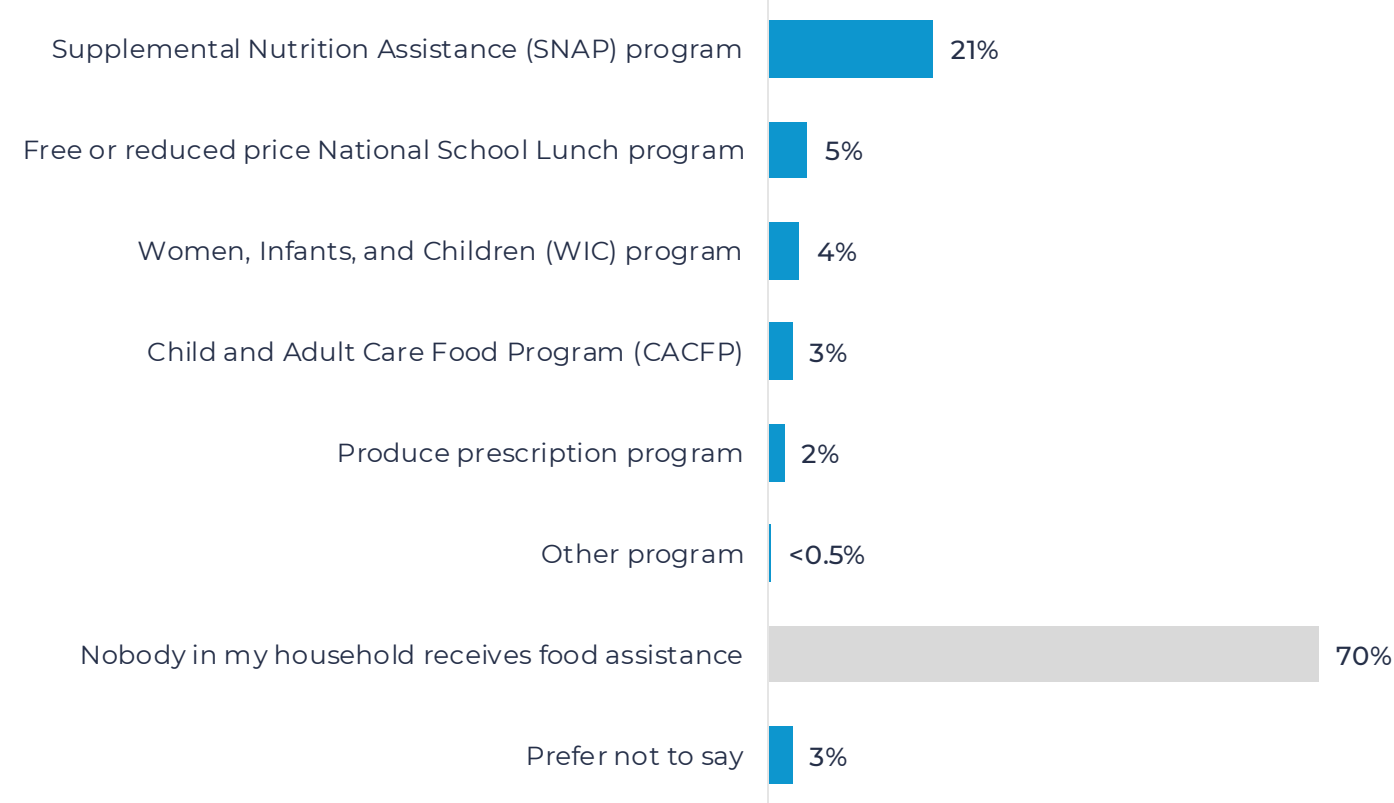


DEMOGRAPHICS

HOUSEHOLD INCOME

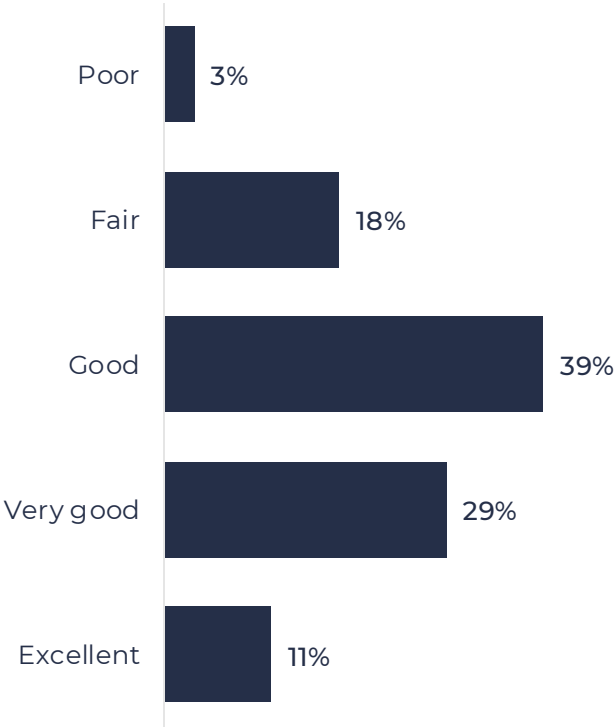


GOVERNMENT FOOD ASSISTANCE

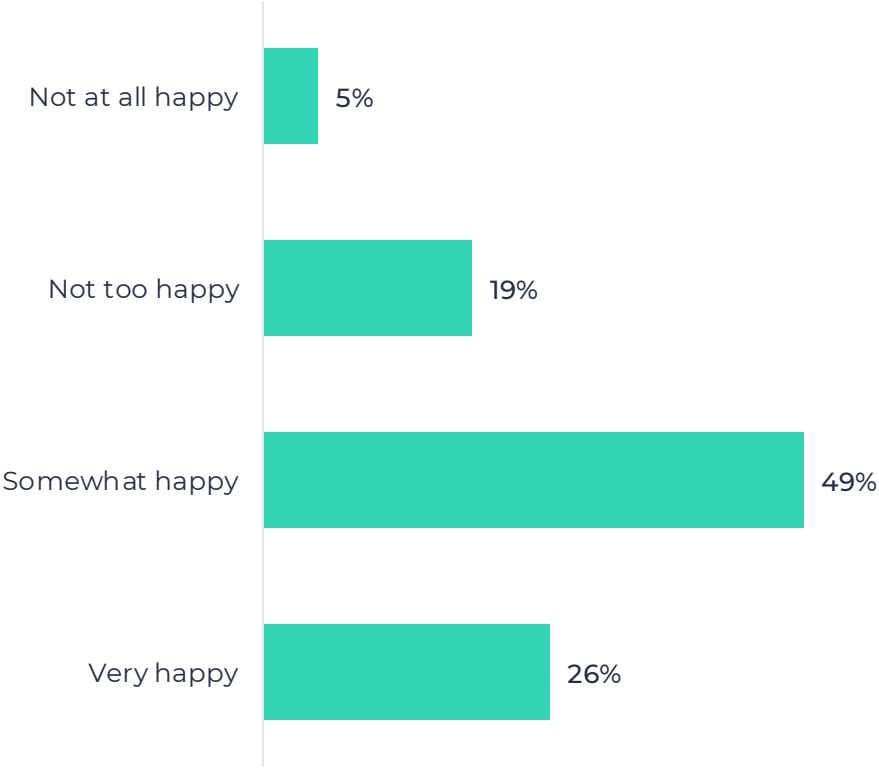


DEMOGRAPHICS

HEALTH STATUS

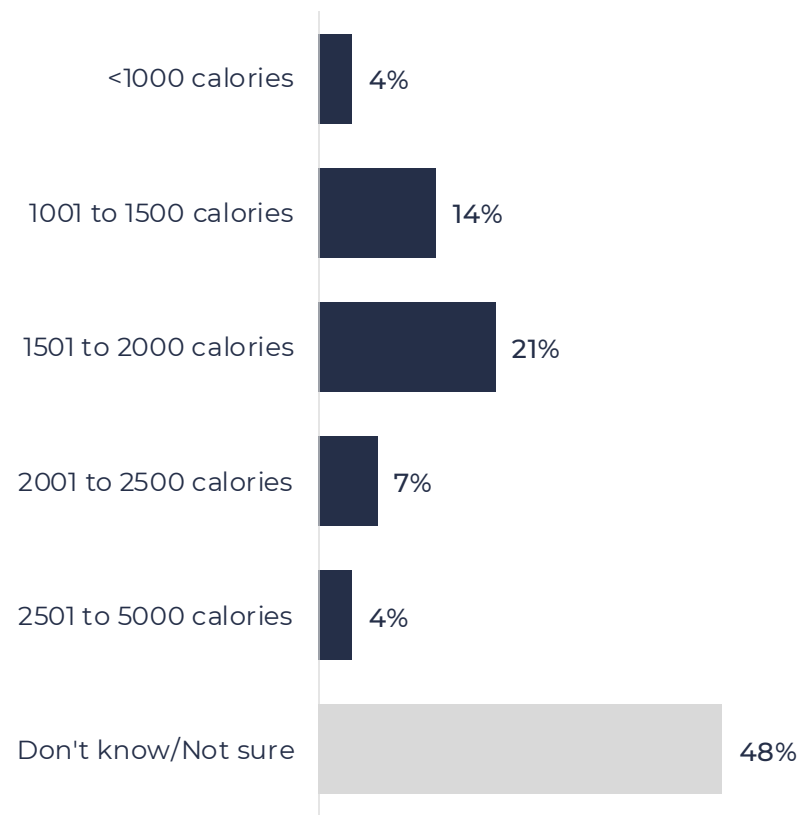


HAPPINESS

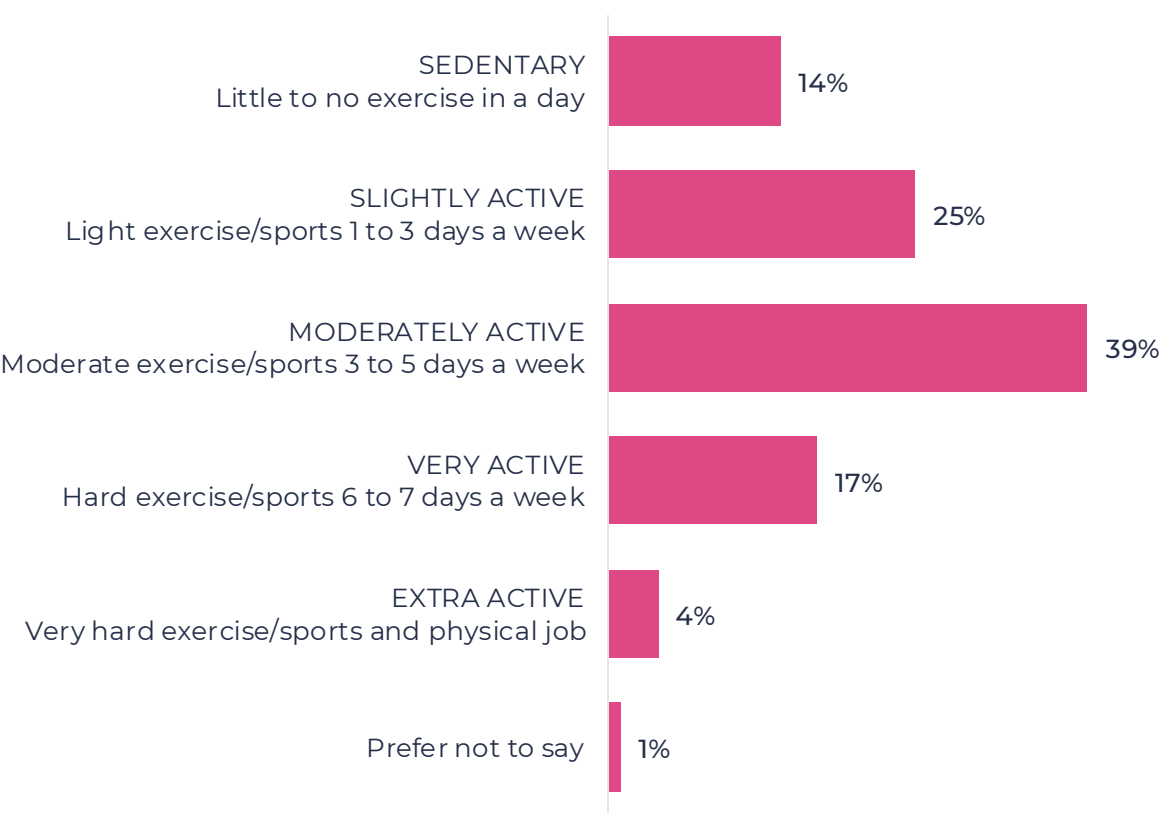


DEMOGRAPHICS

ESTIMATED DAILY CALORIE NEEDS
FOR WEIGHT MAINTENANCE



PHYSICAL ACTIVITY LEVEL



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