



**SPOTLIGHT
SURVEY**

Americans' Perceptions of Chemicals in Food & Packaging

June 2026



METHODOLOGY



The International Food Information Council (IFIC) commissioned an online survey among U.S. consumers to measure knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs about chemicals in food and food packaging. One thousand four adults ages 18 years and older completed the online survey from February 13 through February 22, 2026, and were weighted to ensure proportional results.

The Bayesian confidence level for the survey sample 1,004 is 3.5, which is roughly equivalent to a margin of error of ± 3.1 at the 95% confidence level. Callouts of statistically significant results are included where appropriate on slides displaying results. Something is statistically significant if the result cannot be attributed to random chance. Statistical significance in this report is only compared within each demographic group (e.g. age, race, gender, etc.).

Totals of survey results presented in this report may not add up or equal 100% due to rounding.

SUGGESTED CITATION:

International Food Information Council (IFIC). IFIC Spotlight Survey: Americans' Perceptions of Chemicals in Food & Packaging. June 2026.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

According to the [2025 IFIC Food & Health Survey](#), confidence in the safety of the U.S. food supply has sharply declined in recent years, while concerns about chemicals and contaminants remain among Americans' top food safety issues. This *IFIC Spotlight Survey* builds on that foundation by examining how consumers perceive food risks, evaluate chemicals in food and food packaging, and translate those perceptions into purchasing decisions.

The findings reveal a nuanced picture. While three-quarters of Americans (75%) trust that the foods and beverages they purchase are safe to consume, concerns about ingredients, contaminants, and packaging persist. In fact, 30% report changing their food or beverage purchasing habits in the past year because of safety concerns.

Consumers place the greatest trust in themselves (79%) as well as farmers and ranchers (73%) to ensure food safety, while trust is lower for manufacturers (56%) and government agencies (45%), suggesting that trust is strongest at the ends of the “farm-to-fork” continuum and weaker among the organizations and institutions in between.

The survey also highlights challenges in communicating risk. Although two-thirds of Americans (68%) recognize that a potential hazard may present little actual risk, concerns appear to be influenced more by the presence of a potential hazard than the likelihood of harm.

Food additives remain an area of uncertainty for many Americans. Six in ten (61%) believe natural food additives are safer than man-made ones, and fewer than half believe food additives are carefully studied and regulated for safety (46%) or that approval by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration means a food additive is safe to consume (45%).

Together, findings from this *IFIC Spotlight Survey* offer insights for food and health professionals seeking to build trust, address consumer concerns, and communicate more effectively about food safety, risk, and the role of science in food and beverage decision-making.



KEY FINDINGS

Most Americans trust the foods and beverages they purchase are safe.

Most Americans report trusting that the foods and beverages they purchase are safe to consume. Three-quarters trust them at least somewhat (75%), including 34% who strongly trust their safety. By comparison, relatively few somewhat distrust (10%) or strongly distrust (4%) the safety of the foods and beverages they purchase, while 12% neither trust nor distrust them.

According to the [2025 IFIC Food & Health Survey](#), 55% of Americans are at least somewhat confident in the safety of the U.S. food supply. Findings from this *IFIC Spotlight Survey* suggest Americans express greater trust in the foods and beverages they personally purchase than in the U.S. food supply overall.

Three in ten Americans say they have changed their food and beverage purchasing habits in the past year due to safety concerns.

As conversations about the safety of food as well as food additives and ingredients gain visibility, some Americans may be reassessing their purchasing decisions. While most Americans (65%) say they have not changed their food or beverage purchasing habits in the past year due to safety concerns, a notable share report making changes (30%). Another 6% are not sure.

Americans place the greatest trust in themselves and farmers and ranchers to ensure the safety of their foods and beverages.

Americans place the greatest trust in themselves and those closest to food production to help ensure foods and beverages are safe to consume. Nearly eight in ten trust themselves (79%), including 47% who strongly trust themselves. Farmers and ranchers also receive high trust ratings (73%), including 30% who strongly trust them. Grocery stores and other food retailers (61%), food scientists (59%), restaurants and cafeterias (57%), and food and beverage manufacturers (56%) receive more moderate levels of trust. Government agencies receive the most mixed evaluations, with 45% trusting them, 30% distrusting them, and 25% neither trusting nor distrusting them.

Overall, findings from this *IFIC Spotlight Survey* suggest Americans place greater trust in the individuals directly involved with food production and personal decision-making than in regulatory authorities and other institutions.

KEY FINDINGS

Most Americans recognize that a hazard may not always be high risk.

Two-thirds (68%) of Americans agree that something can have the potential to cause harm (i.e., be a hazard), yet still be unlikely to cause harm (i.e., be low risk). This includes 22% who strongly agree and 45% who somewhat agree. By comparison, 14% somewhat disagree and 8% strongly disagree, while 11% are not sure.

These findings suggest many Americans recognize the distinction between risk and hazard when presented in a written statement, though uncertainty and disagreement about the relationship between the two concepts remain.

Americans are mixed on the relationship between risk and hazard.

Survey takers who agreed or disagreed that something can be a hazard yet still be low risk were asked to select a reason that best explained their thinking. Nearly one-quarter (23%) say that if something can cause harm, they generally think it is high risk. Others say risk depends mainly on how serious the harm could be (18%), how likely they are to be exposed (13%), how often they are exposed (13%), or the extent of the exposure (11%). Fewer than one in ten (9%) say they do not usually think about the potential for harm in these terms.

KEY FINDINGS

Nearly half of Americans say they avoid certain food and beverage packaging materials.

Food and beverage packaging is a factor in how Americans evaluate the products they purchase. Nearly half say they avoid certain packaging materials (47%), while 53% say they do not.

Americans who avoid certain packaging materials cite chemical safety and health impact as top concerns.

Among Americans who avoid certain food and beverage packaging materials, concerns about chemical safety (54%) and potential impacts on health (51%) are the leading reasons for doing so. Roughly one-third also cite concerns about storage or convenience (34%), the environment (33%), and impacts on taste (33%), while fewer point to breakage or leakage concerns (29%).

Findings from this *IFIC Spotlight Survey* indicate that packaging concerns have become closely tied to perceptions of food safety, chemical exposure, and personal health, rather than environmental considerations alone.

Most Americans feel confident that food and beverage packaging materials have been evaluated for safety.

Two-thirds (66%) of Americans report being at least somewhat confident that the chemicals and materials used for food and beverage packaging have been evaluated for safety (21% very confident, 45% somewhat confident). By contrast, about one-quarter (27%) say they are not too confident (20%) or not at all confident (7%).

Nearly half of Americans say transparent labeling would build their confidence in the safety of food and beverage packaging.

Americans most often say transparent labeling about packaging materials and potential chemical exposure would help them feel confident about the safety of food and beverage packaging (45%). Others point to findings from independent scientific research about packaging safety (35%), information about how packaging materials are tested for safety (35%), clear explanations of current government packaging safety regulations (32%), and explanations of the difference between “risk” and “hazard” (32%). Nearly one-third say showing how exposure from packaging relates to everyday exposures would build their confidence. Just 13% say they do not need additional information to feel confident.

KEY FINDINGS

More Americans express concern about pathogens, microplastics, and contaminants in foods and beverages than nutrients to limit, additives, or ingredients.

Bacteria and viruses (77%) as well as microplastics (76%) generate the highest level of concern among Americans when thinking about what may be in foods and beverages. Heavy metals such as arsenic and lead (74%), pesticide residues (73%), and chemicals in food packaging (73%) follow close behind. Nutrition-related concerns, such as high amounts of added sugar, saturated fat, or sodium, also concern most Americans (71%). Slightly fewer Americans are concerned with synthetic food colors (67%), preservatives (66%), antibiotics (65%), low- and no-calorie sweeteners (63%), GMO/bioengineered ingredients (62%), and allergens (61%). Concern is notably lower for natural food colors (40%).

Americans express the most concern about potential pathogens and heavy metals in foods and beverages.

When asked to consider their concerns about what may be in foods and beverages and rank the two that concern them most, bacteria and viruses rank highest (34%) as both the most concerning item (18%) and second most concerning item (16%). Heavy metals (27%) follow closely behind (11% most concerning; 16% second most concerning), along with microplastics (20%) and pesticide residues (20%). Slightly fewer are most concerned about nutrition (16%), chemicals in food packaging (14%), low- and no-calorie sweeteners (14%), and synthetic food colors (13%).

These findings suggest Americans are balancing multiple concerns, with acute microbial concern for foodborne illness edging out concern for long-term exposure to chemicals and contaminants.

KEY FINDINGS

Most Americans believe microplastics are harmful and scientists are still learning about their health effects.

More than eight in ten Americans agree microplastics are harmful to human health (81%), including 51% who strongly agree and 30% who somewhat agree. Similar shares agree microplastics are harmful to marine life (73%), animal health (73%), and environmental health (73%). Seven in ten agree scientists are still learning about the health effects of microplastics (70%), and a similar share agree microplastics are man-made (70%). More than two-thirds also agree microplastics are found in many foods and beverages (68%).

Americans express mixed views about the use, safety, and regulation of food additives.

While the U.S. federal government considers new frameworks for regulating food additives, consumer sentiment about their use, safety, and regulation is mixed. Most Americans agree food additives are used more today than when they were kids (68%) and that scientists are still learning about the health effects of food additives (67%). Six in ten also agree the U.S. allows more additives in food than Europe (61%) and that natural food additives are safer to consume than man-made ones (61%).

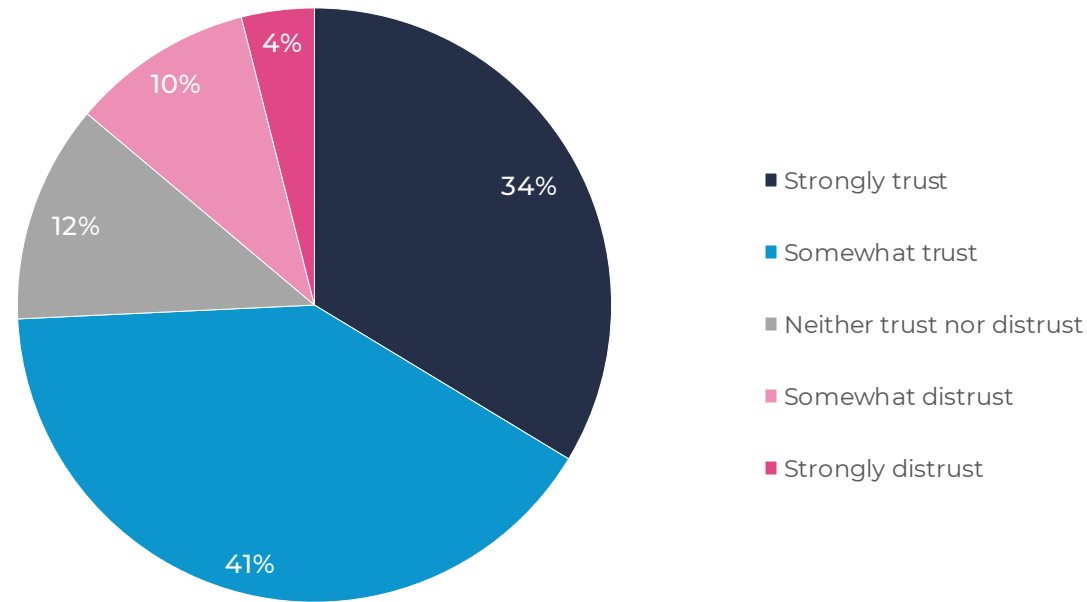
However, views are more divided regarding food additive safety and oversight. About half agree food additives help keep food safe (52%), while fewer than half agree food additives are carefully studied and regulated for safety (46%) or that a food additive approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration is safe to consume (45%).

Overall, findings in this *IFIC Spotlight Survey* point to skepticism among many Americans about food additives, particularly regarding their long-term health effects and U.S. regulation compared to Europe.

Most Americans trust the foods and beverages they purchase are safe.

Three-quarters (75%) of Americans trust that the foods and beverages they purchase are safe to consume, including 34% who strongly trust them, while 13% express distrust.

Trust That Purchased Foods & Beverages Are Safe To Consume

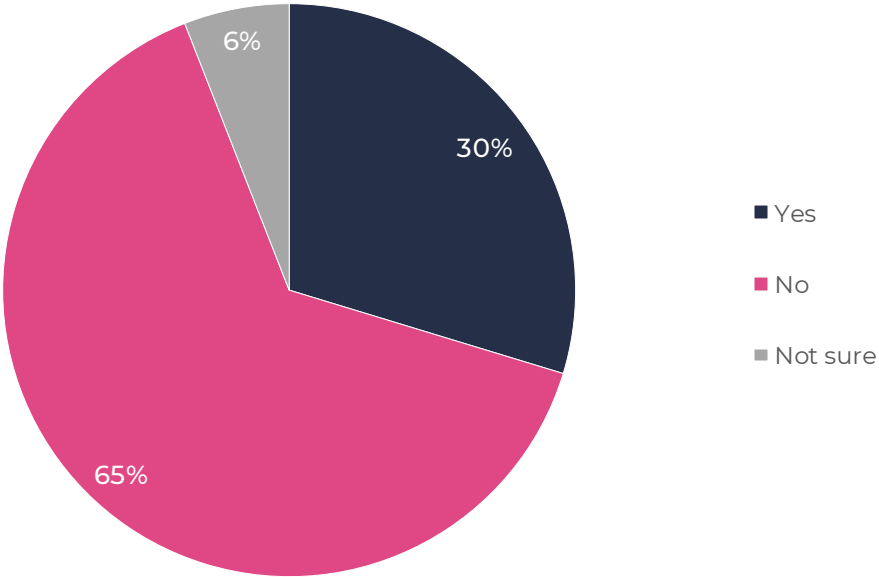


Totals may not add up or equal 100% due to rounding

Three in ten Americans say they have changed their food and beverage purchasing habits in the past year due to safety concerns.

While 30% say they changed what foods and beverages they purchased in the past year due to safety concerns, 65% report making no changes.

Changed Purchasing In The Past Year Due To Safety Concerns

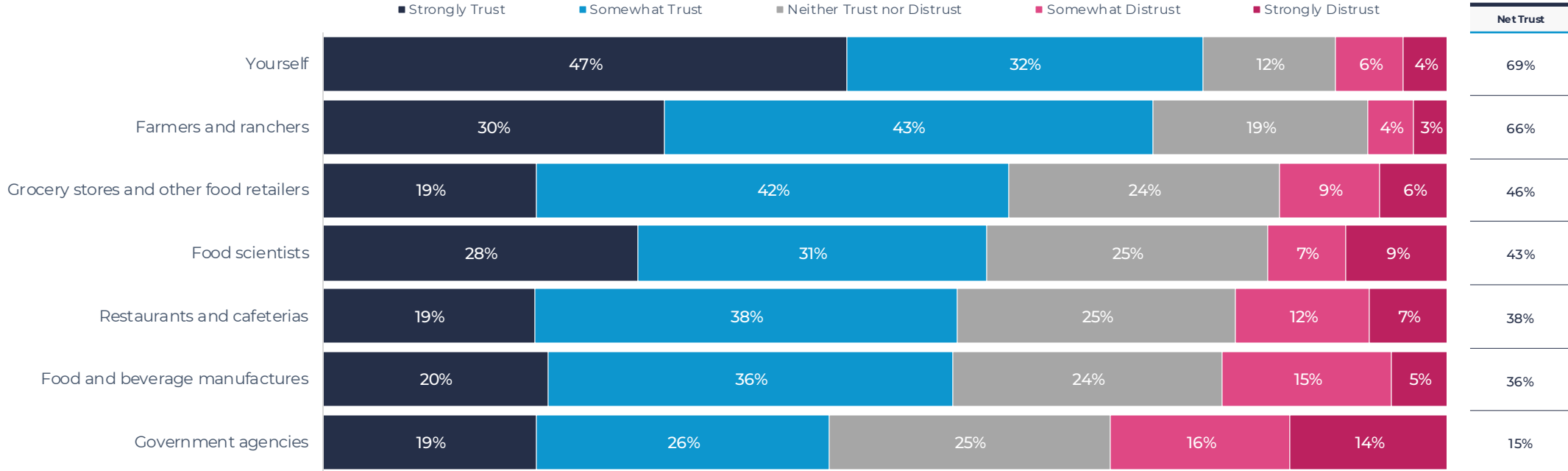


Total does not add up to 100% due to rounding

Americans place the greatest trust in themselves as well as farmers and ranchers to ensure the safety of their foods and beverages.

More than seven in ten Americans trust themselves (79%) and farmers and ranchers (73%) to help ensure food safety, followed by grocery stores and other food retailers (61%), food scientists (59%), restaurants and cafeterias (57%), food and beverage manufacturers (56%), and government agencies (45%).

Who Americans Trust To Ensure Their Food Is Safe



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

Net Trust = % Trust (Somewhat + Strongly) minus % Distrust (Somewhat + Strongly)

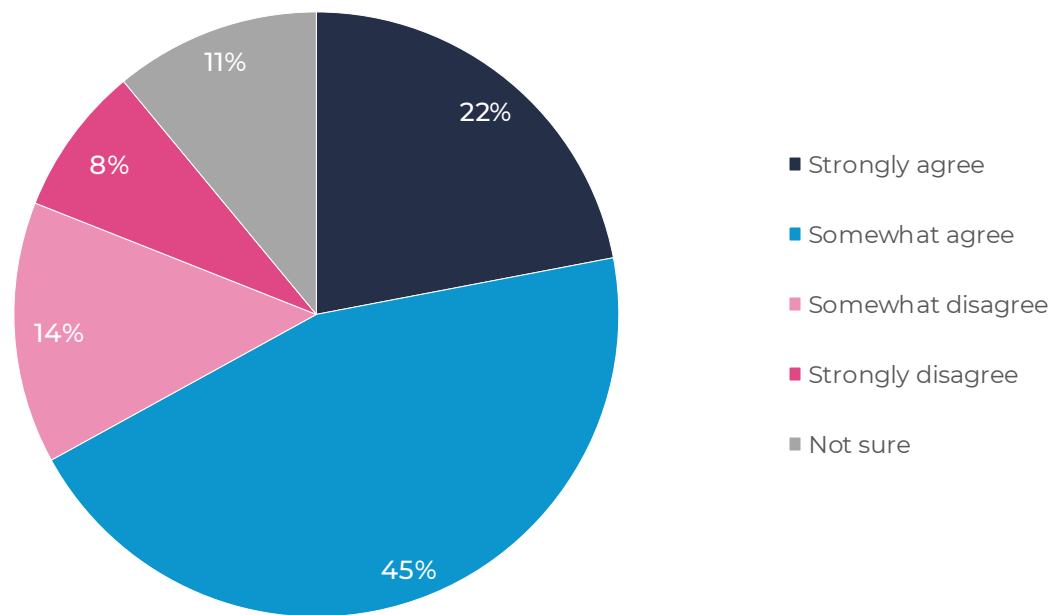


Q3. How much do you trust each of the following to help ensure the foods and beverages you purchase are safe to consume? (n=1004)

Most Americans recognize that a hazard may not always be high risk.

Two in three (68%) agree that something can be capable of causing harm yet still present low risk, including 22% who strongly agree, while 21% disagree and 11% are unsure.

Agreement That A Hazard Can Still Represent Low Risk



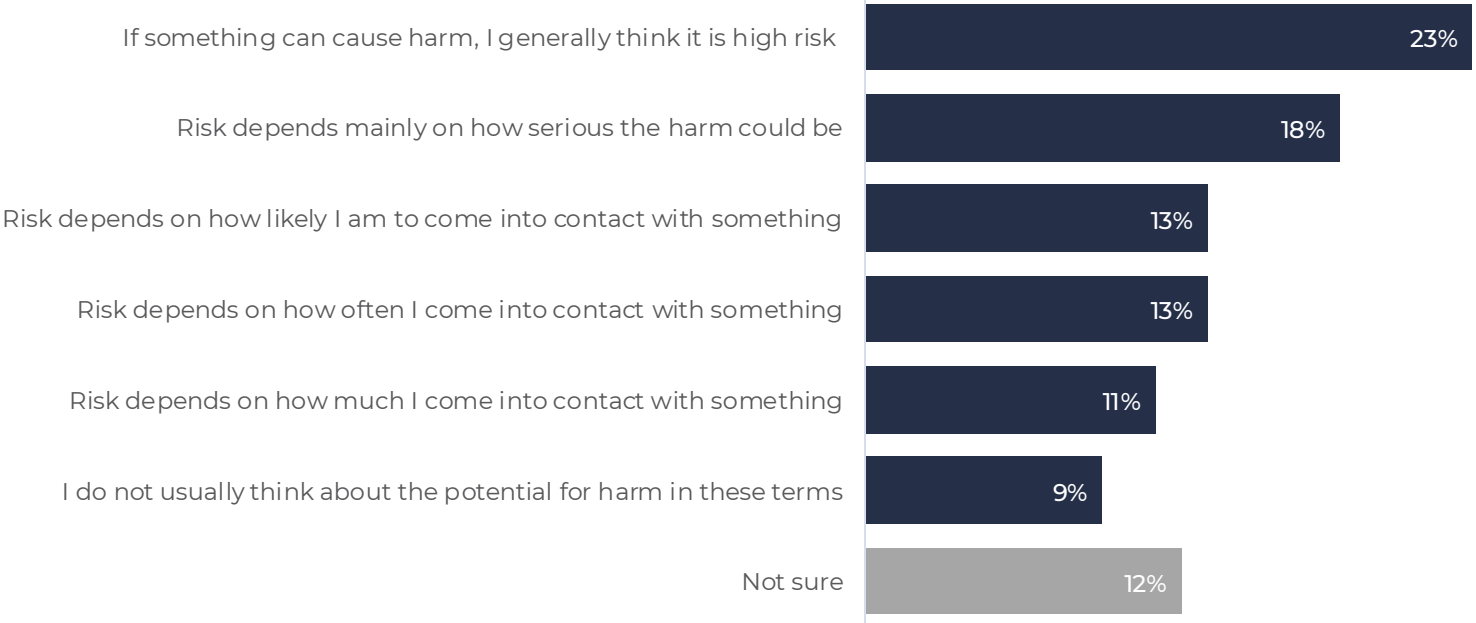
Totals may not add up or equal 100% due to rounding

Q4. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement? (n=1004)
"Something can be a hazard (able to cause you harm) yet still be low risk (unlikely to cause you harm)"

Americans are mixed on the relationship between risk and hazard.

Among Americans who expressed a view on the relationship between risk and hazard, 23% equate the potential for harm with high risk, while others focus on severity of potential harm (18%) and the likelihood (13%), frequency (13%), or amount of exposure (11%). One in ten (9%) do not think about the potential for harm in these ways.

Reasoning Behind Views Of Risk & Hazard



Total does not add up to 100% due to rounding

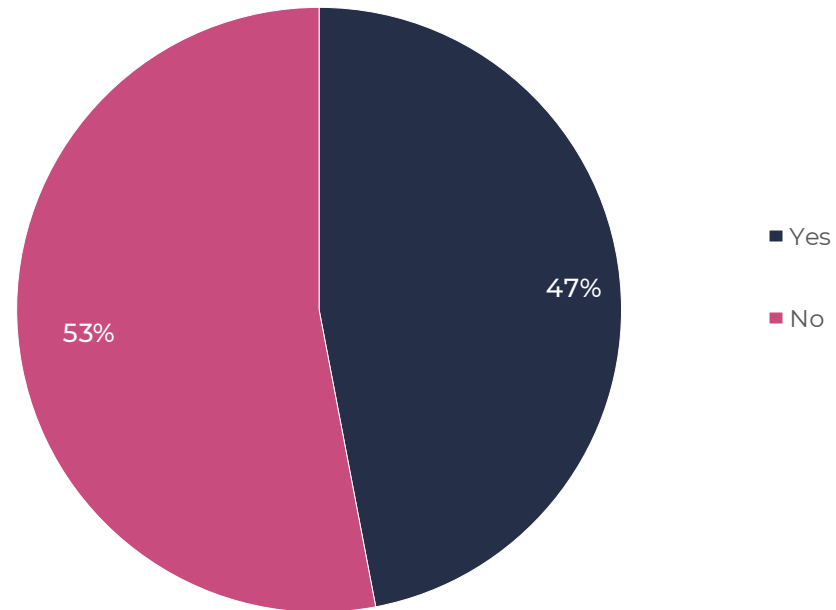


Q5. Which statement best explains your thinking? (n=886; FILTER: Excludes those unsure of risk/hazard relationship)

Nearly half of Americans say they avoid certain food and beverage packaging materials.

While 47% of Americans say they avoid certain food and beverage packaging materials, 53% do not.

Avoidance Of Certain Food & Beverage Packaging Materials

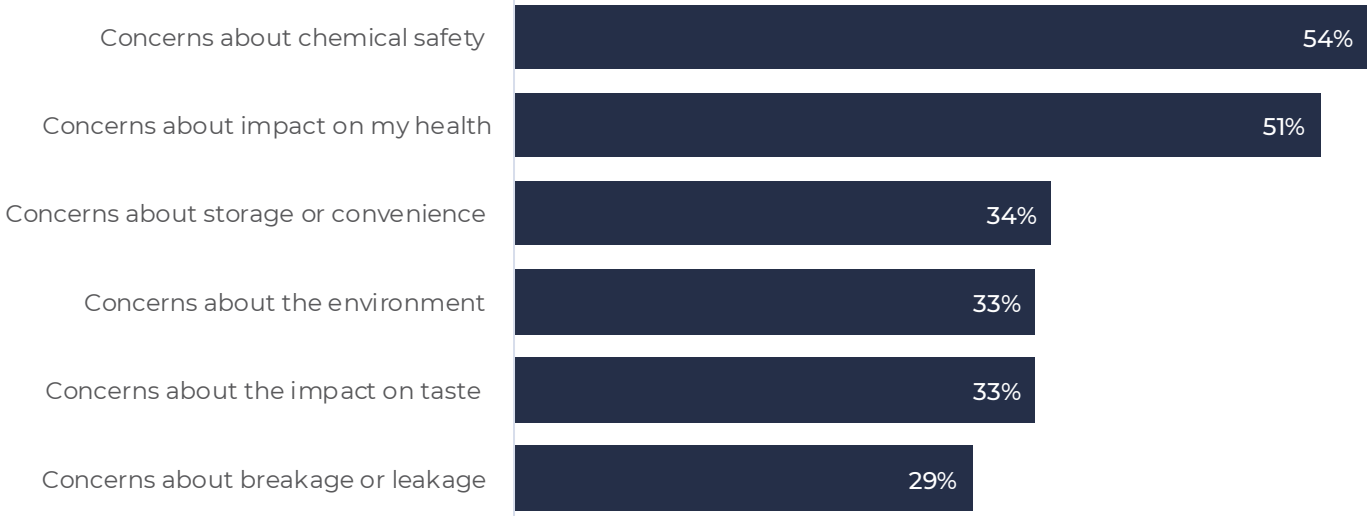


Americans who avoid certain packaging materials cite chemical safety and health impact as top concerns.

Avoidance of food packaging materials is driven by concerns about chemical safety (54%) and personal health impact (51%), while fewer cite concerns about storage or convenience (34%), the environment (33%), impact on taste (33%), and/or packaging integrity (29%).

Reasons For Avoiding Certain Food Packaging Materials

If avoids certain food and beverage packaging materials

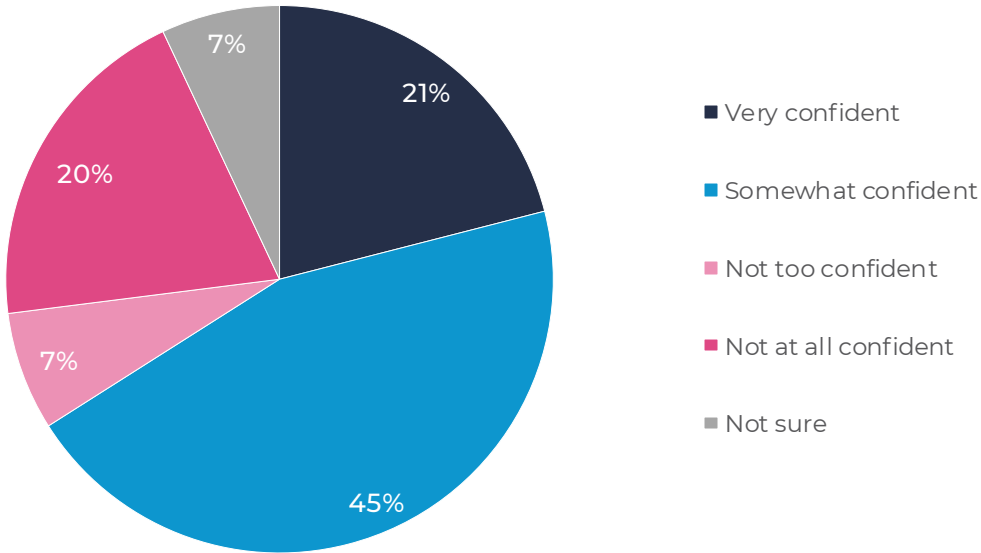


Q7. Why do you avoid certain food and beverage packaging materials? Select all that apply. (n=474; FILTER: Avoids certain food and beverage packaging materials)

Two in three Americans feel confident that food and beverage packaging materials have been evaluated for safety.

Two in three (66%) are at least somewhat confident that chemicals and materials used in food packaging have been evaluated for safety, including 21% who are very confident. More than one in four (27%) lack confidence, including 20% who are not at all confident.

Confidence That Food & Beverage Packaging Materials Has Been Evaluated For Safety



Nearly half of Americans say transparent labeling would build their confidence in food and beverage packaging safety.

While 45% would feel confident in food and beverage packaging safety with transparent labeling about potential chemical exposure, about one-third cite findings from independent research (35%), information about how packaging is tested (35%), clear explanations of government regulations (32%) and risk vs. hazard (32%), as well as comparisons to everyday exposures (28%). Just over one in ten (13%) do not need more information to feel confident.

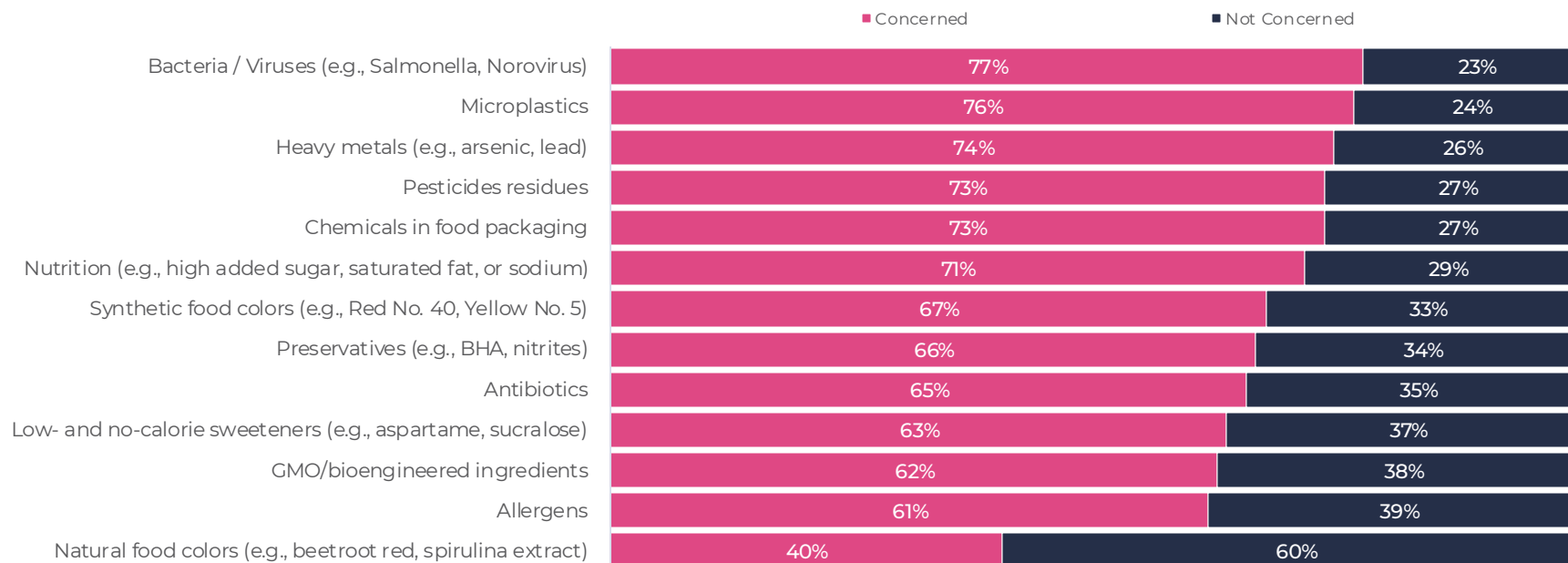
What Would Build Confidence In Food & Beverage Packaging Safety



More Americans express concern about pathogens, microplastics, and contaminants in foods and beverages than nutrients to limit, additives, or ingredients.

Following concern about bacteria and viruses (77%) and microplastics (76%), Americans also cite heavy metals (74%), pesticide residues (73%), and chemicals in food packaging (73%) as top concerns. Concern about synthetic food colors (67%) is substantially higher than concerns about natural food colors (40%).

Concern About Potential Substances In Foods & Beverages



Average number of items selected per respondent = 8.69



Q10. For each of the following, please indicate whether you are concerned about it being in your foods or beverages. (n=1004)

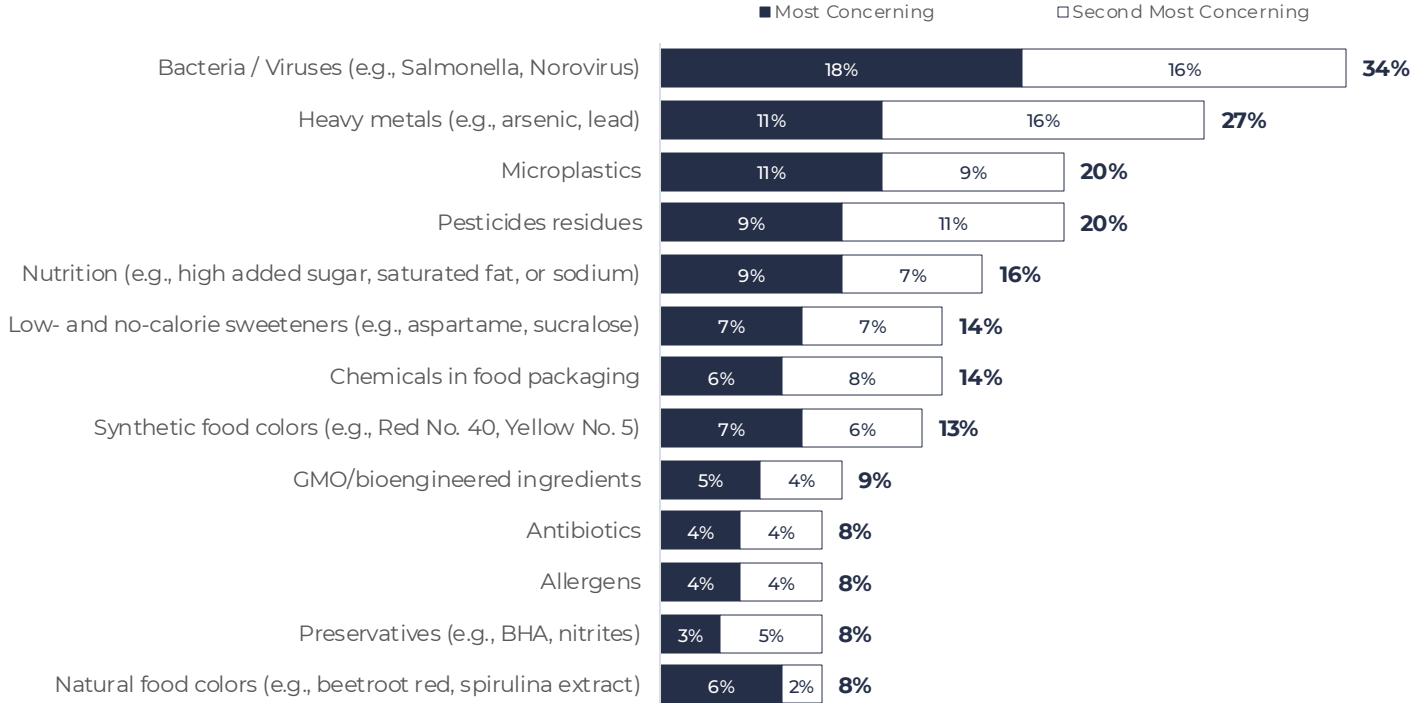
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Americans express the most concern about potential pathogens and heavy metals in foods and beverages.

Among items potentially found in foods and beverages, Americans are most likely to rank bacteria and viruses (34%) and heavy metals (27%) among their top two concerns, followed by microplastics (20%) and pesticide residues (20%).

Level Of Concern About Potential Substances In Foods & Beverages

Top 2 ranking of items previously selected as concerning



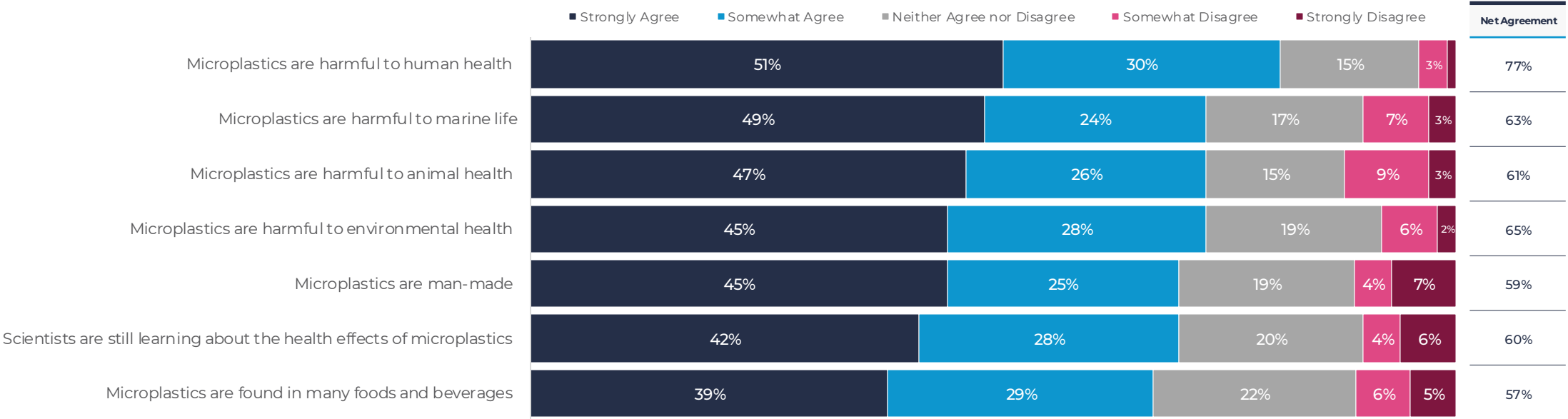
Q11. You said you are concerned about the following items in your foods and beverages. Which two concern you the most? Please select and rank them. (n=1004; FILTER: Top two rankings among previously selected items of concern)



Most Americans believe microplastics are harmful and scientists are still learning about their health effects.

At least seven in ten Americans believe that microplastics harm human health (81%), marine life (73%), animals (73%), and the environment (73%), while 70% also believe that scientists are still learning about their health effects.

Perceptions Of Microplastics



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

Net Agreement = % Agree (Somewhat + Strongly) minus % Disagree (Somewhat + Strongly)



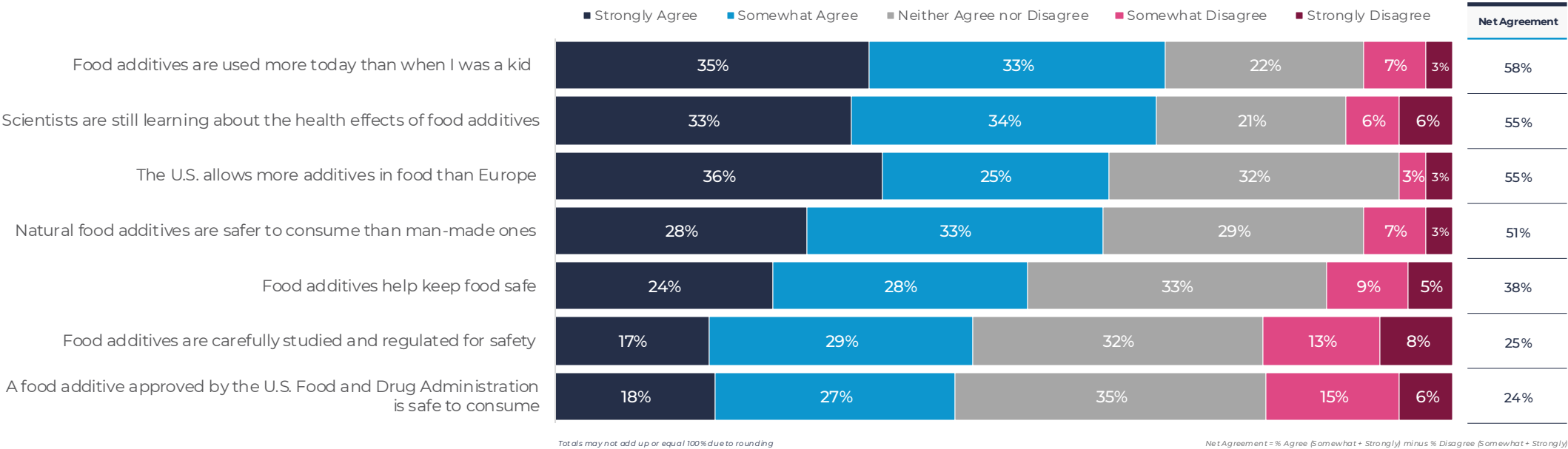
Q12. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about microplastics? (n=1004)

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Americans express mixed views about the use, safety, and regulation of food additives.

Most Americans believe food additives are used more today than when they were growing up (68%) and that scientists are still learning about their health effects (67%), while fewer than half believe food additives are carefully studied and regulated for safety (46%) or that FDA approval means they are safe to consume (45%).

Beliefs & Perceptions About Food Additives



Q13. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about food additives (e.g., colors, flavors, preservatives)? (n=1004)



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