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**Vegetarian Journal 2006 Issue 4**

## **How Many Adults Are Vegetarian?**

**The Vegetarian Resource Group Asked in a 2006 National Poll**

**by Charles Stahler**

**T**hese days, almost everybody seems to have a daughter, a cousin, or a friend who is vegetarian. Even large corporations have become greatly interested in vegetarian and cruelty-free items. For example, Colgate recently purchased control of Tom's of Maine for \$100 million. Silk and its parent company White Wave were bought by Dean Foods, the largest U.S. processor of dairy foods.

Though a high number of Americans are interested in natural foods, how many adults are actually vegetarian? To find out this answer, The Vegetarian Resource Group posed the following question in a national poll conducted by Harris Interactive®.

**Please tell us which of the following foods, if any, you never eat:**

- **Meat**
- **Poultry**
- **Fish or Seafood**
- **Dairy Products**
- **Eggs**
- **Honey**

FDA. 1998. P. 0032

BKG

Because we use the word “never” and name the foods, The VRG’s tallies will be different from those in other polls that simply ask if one is a vegetarian. Those polls are more dependent on personal definitions.

In this year’s poll, 2.3 percent of adults aged 18 years or older say they never eat meat, fish, or fowl and, thus, are vegetarian. Furthermore, 6.7 percent of the total say they never eat meat.

### **Dietary Habits of Adults 18 and Older in the United States in 2006**

100%	Total adults
6.7%	Never eat meat
6.3%	Never eat poultry
14.6%	Never eat fish/seafood
7.6%	Never eat dairy products
8.8%	Never eat eggs
23.4%	Never eat honey
2.3%	Never eat meat, poultry, fish/seafood (vegetarian)
1.4%	Never eat meat, poultry, fish/seafood, dairy products/eggs (vegan, except for possibly honey)

Nine percent of females say they don’t eat meat, which makes them almost twice as likely as males at 5 percent to abstain from eating meat. However, the percentage of vegetarians is almost evenly split between genders with 3 percent of women and 2 percent of men being vegetarian. Approximately 1.4 percent of the total population is vegan, meaning that their diets do not contain meat, fish, poultry, dairy, or eggs. Some 1.4 percent of men are vegan, while 1.3 percent of women are vegan, another almost even split between genders.

Because this poll used small numbers, we can’t truly make conclusions about the gender split for vegetarians, non-meat-eaters, and vegans. Nevertheless, these numbers support The VRG’s anecdotal observations.

## **Percentage of Various Groups Who Never Eat Meat (Rounded to Whole Numbers)**

7%	Total Adults
5%	Male
9%	Female
9%	45- to 54-year-olds
5%	18- to 24-year-olds
8%	North East
6%	North Central
6%	South
7%	West
6%	White (excluding Hispanic)
7%	Black (excluding Hispanic)
8%	Hispanic
4%	High School Not Completed
6%	High School Graduate
8%	College Graduate

The VRG's 2003 poll, which was also conducted by Harris Interactive®, found that 2.8 percent of the U.S. adult population was vegetarian. A survey of this size can have a sampling error of plus or minus 3 percentage points, and there are other possible sources of errors in all polls. Thus, a direct comparison with past polls is nonconclusive. However, taking into account our other polls over the years, The Vegetarian Resource Group believes the number of vegetarians and those never eating meat is relatively steady, and this is a group that is definitely not going away.

In 1994 and 1997, The VRG asked a similar question to this year's in a Roper Poll. The number of vegetarians for those years was reported at approximately 1 percent, and the

number of non-meat-eaters was between 5 and 6 percent. At the time, The VRG was told that we could only be sure of a definite statistical movement if there was a change of 3 or more percentage points in future surveys.

In The VRG's 2000 national Zogby Poll of 968 adults, approximately 2.5 percent of the population was vegetarian. Again, these different polls can't be compared directly, and there are margins of error. However, there appears to be a solid vegetarian segment of the U.S. population, and this group will not disappear.

The U.S. 2000 census found that there are approximately 205 million non-institutionalized adults aged 18 years or older in the United States. Based on 2.3 percent being vegetarian, we calculate there are approximately 4.7 million adult vegetarians in the U.S. Since there are more people in 2006, the number of vegetarians would be somewhat higher. Again, this is only an estimate, and these numbers are very different than the audience that seeks vegetarian options at least some of the time, which The VRG estimates to be 30 to 40 percent of the population.

Furthermore, this poll supports The VRG's belief that the number of vegans (who never eat meat, fish, fowl, dairy products, or eggs) is between one-third and one-half of the number of vegetarians in the U.S. Thus, companies that are focusing on the vegetarian audience, or are trying to reach vegetarian trendsetters, should continue to produce vegan foods to appeal to the largest possible audience.

## **Methodology**

This survey was conducted by Harris Interactive® on behalf of The Vegetarian Resource Group by telephone within the United States between April 14 and 17, 2006, among a nationwide cross section of 1,000 adults (aged 18 and over). Figures for age, sex, race, and region were weighted when necessary to bring them into line with their actual proportions in the population.

In theory, with probability samples of this size, one could say with 95 percent certainty that the results for the overall sample have a sampling error of plus or minus 3 percentage points. Sampling error for the various sub-sample results is higher and varies.

## **About Harris Interactive®**

Harris Interactive Inc. ([www.harrisinteractive.com](http://www.harrisinteractive.com)), based in Rochester, New York, is the 13th largest market research firm in the world, most widely know for The Harris Poll®. Harris Interactive serves clients worldwide through its United States, Europe ([www.harrisinteractive.com/europe](http://www.harrisinteractive.com/europe)), and Asia offices, through its wholly-owned subsidiary Novatris in Paris, France ([www.novatris.com](http://www.novatris.com)), and through an independent global network of affiliate market research companies.

**Charles Stahler is Co-Director of The Vegetarian Resource Group.**

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The *Vegetarian Journal* published here is not the complete issue, but these are excerpts from the published magazine. Anyone who wishes to see everything should [subscribe to the magazine](#).

Thanks to volunteer Stephanie Schueler for converting this article to HTML.

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