

Certain demographic characteristics typify non-beef eaters and meat avoiders

by Rick McCarty
Executive Director, Issues Management – NCBA

Summary

Previous checkoff-funded consumer attitude research has found a small percentage of consumers who, though not describing themselves as vegetarians, nevertheless did not eat beef. Research designed to identify demographic characteristics of these non-beef eaters found one group of consumers categorized as beef avoiders and a broader group categorized as meat avoiders.

Background

Only a small percentage (7%) of consumers do not eat beef so acquiring a sample large enough to provide meaningful data required a different research strategy. A single, random-sample survey of 1,000-plus adults might find only 60 to 70 individuals who did not eat beef. Therefore, it was necessary to use a series of five omnibus surveys (a total of 5,000 interviews) each with a question asking respondents if they ate beef, pork, lamb. Across the five surveys, 324 individuals were identified as beef avoiders, roughly 7 percent of all adults, and demographic data for these respondents were aggregated and analyzed (margin of error of $\pm 5.4\%$).

Beef avoiders

Overall, the demographic groups more likely to report they do not eat beef include whites (70% vs. 25% other races), women (63% vs. 37% for men), suburban dwellers (46% vs. 36% urban and 18% rural), individuals with a household income of \$50,000 or more (35% vs. 21.5% for less than \$50,000), college degree-holders (47% vs. 25% for some college and 27% for high school or less), respondents who are not married (56% vs. 44% married), and individuals with no children (69% vs. 29% for parents). Self-identified beef avoiders represent roughly 7 percent of the adult population.

Meat avoiders

Among beef avoiders, the largest proportion of individuals can be classified as meat avoiders (do not eat beef, pork or lamb). These are the individuals who most closely match the definition of vegetarianism. More than half (57%) of beef avoiders fit this description (roughly 4% of the adult population). This group differs in significant ways from the more specific category of beef avoiders.

In general, the demographic groups more likely to report they are meat avoiders include individuals age 18-34 (69%), urban dwellers (64%), residents of western states (60%), and individuals with at least some college education (57% some college, 61% college degree). Where beef avoiders are generally typified by the unmarried professional woman, the stricter meat avoiders are typically city-dwelling college students and recent college graduates.

Pork and lamb eaters

Roughly 3 percent of the adult population falls into this category. Among those who do not eat beef but report they do eat pork, lamb or both, the percentage of pork eaters (36%) is more than double the incidence of lamb eaters (17%). The demographic groups more likely to report they eat pork, lamb or both (compared to eating no meat) are women (46%), individuals age 65 or older (48%), rural residents (55%), individuals with a household income less than \$25,000 (49%), those with a high school education or less (51%) and retirees (53%).

Key Points

- Beef avoiders represent about 7 percent of the adult U.S. population.
- Beef avoiders tend to be suburban, white, female, college-educated, upper income, single with no children.
- More than half (57%) of beef avoiders are meat avoiders and fit the definition of vegetarian.
- Meat avoiders tend to be young, urban, western and with some college education.