

Consumer Trends: Majority of Americans Want More Food Safety Oversight

NEW YORK (PRNewswire) — Food recall announcements have become something of a news cycle staple in the past few years. From spinach and peanut butter to chicken and pet foods, there seems to be little left in the U.S. food supply that should not be viewed with at least a modicum of suspicion. As such, it's likely not surprising that strong majorities of U.S. adults say food recalls have them at least somewhat concerned (86%, with 58% somewhat concerned and 28% seriously concerned) and believe there should be more government oversight in regards to food safety (73%).

These are some of the results of The Harris Poll® of 2,236 adults surveyed online between January 15 and 20, 2014. (Full results, including data tables, available can be found [here](#) [1])

Food recall concerns — and calls for increased government oversight where the food supply is concerned — are stronger among some subsets of Americans than others:

- Women are more likely than men to indicate being both seriously (31% women, 25% men) and somewhat (61% and 55%, respectively) concerned; they are also more likely than their male counterparts to believe there should be more government oversight in regards to food safety (77% and 69%, respectively).
- Americans in low income households - specifically households with an annual income under \$35,000 - are more likely than those in higher earning households to describe food recalls as a serious concern (36% in households earning <\$35k, 21% in households earning \$35k-\$49,999, 26% in \$50k+ households).
- Turning to political leanings, Democrats (32%) are more likely than Republicans (25%) to characterize food recalls as a serious concern. The call for more government oversight rings most loudly from the Democrats' camp (86%) and least so from Republicans (60%), with Independents in the middle (70%).

Waxing or waning?

U.S. adults are somewhat divided on the question of whether there have been more health and/or safety prompted food recalls recently than in the past few years (43%) or if their frequency has remained about the same (50%). Few, however, believe things have improved, with only 7% indicating there have been fewer than in the past few years.

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- Older Americans – specifically Baby Boomers (48%, ages 49-67) and Matures (49%, ages 68+) – are more likely than their younger counterparts (38% Echo Boomers [ages 18-36], 37% Gen Xers [ages 37-48]) to believe there have been more such recalls.
- The perception that the number of recalls has risen is also stronger among women (48%) than men (37%).

When those who think there have been more food recalls lately are asked who they hold most responsible for this increase, the highest percentage by a dramatic margin place the blame on those responsible for packaging and/or processing food (50%), though the federal government (19%) and those responsible for growing and/or raising food (16%) don't escape this blame.

- Though overall few Americans place the lion's share of blame on consumers, for wanting food to be as cheap as possible (6%), it's worth noting that men (9%) are twice as likely as women (4%) to take such a position.
- Those in households with children are twice as likely as those without to point to those responsible for growing and/or raising food (24% with, 12% without).
- Matures (65%) are the generation most likely to blame those responsible for packaging and/or processing food, with Echo Boomers (35%) least likely to do so; blame among Gen Xers (57%) and Baby Boomers (52%) falls in the middle.
- Matures are less likely than any other generation to lay the blame on those responsible for growing and/or raising food (21% Echo Boomers, 15% Gen Xers, 16% Baby Boomers, 5% Matures).

Regardless of whether food recalls are on the rise or not, they have inarguably become a regular occurrence in the U.S., and six in ten Americans (61%) say that because of food safety concerns, they try to buy as much food locally as they can.

- Women (68%) are more likely than men (52%) to indicate this.
- Additionally, Matures (73%) are more likely than either Echo Boomers (54%) or Gen Xers (57%) to do so; Baby Boomers (64%) are also more likely than Echo Boomers to indicate this.

Americans are split on whether food safety issues are an inevitable side effect of low food costs, with roughly half each agreeing (52%) and disagreeing (48%) with the sentiment.

- Younger Americans (59% Echo Boomers, 56% Gen Xers) are more likely than their older counterparts (47% Baby Boomers, 45% Matures) agree with this sentiment.

Forgiveness is divine

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Health or safety related food recalls can have enormous implications for a company's reputation and patronage – but not a permanent one, at least for a majority of Americans. Over half of U.S. adults (55%) indicate that if a brand they usually purchase is involved with a recall or safety concern issue, they'll temporarily switch to another brand and then return to the recalled brand once it's safe.

On the other hand, 16% say they'll purchase another brand and never purchase the recalled brand again, and an additional 17% would thereafter avoid any brands made by the recalled product's manufacturer.

- Baby Boomers and Matures (60% each) are more likely than Echo Boomers (49%) to say they would temporarily switch brands, while Echo Boomers are more likely than any other generation to say they would never purchase the recalled brand again (24% Echo Boomers, 15% Gen Xers, 12% Baby Boomers, 9% Matures).
- Republicans (63%) are more likely than either Democrats (54%) or Independents (55%) to say they would make a temporary brand switch.

To view the full findings, or to see other recent Harris Polls, please visit the [Harris Poll News Room](#) [2].

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