

Amid rising food costs, half of low-income households say the new Canada Food Guide diet is unaffordable

Most support the guide's recommendations, but there's a generational divide over the importance of dairy

April 10, 2019 – Nearly half of all Canadians say it has grown more difficult to afford to put food on the table over the last 12 months, and four-in-ten say adhering to the diet recommended in the recently updated Canada Food Guide would make paying their household's food bill even more challenging.

These are some of the findings of a new study from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute, which canvassed Canadians' views on the price and nutritional value of the food they eat.

The sense that food is getting harder to afford is [rooted in reality](#) and cuts across income brackets, but it is Canadians in lower-income households who are more likely to see the consequences of rising prices in their lives.

Respondents with household incomes under \$50,000 are considerably more likely to have chosen less healthy, cheaper options, or to have cut back on meat and vegetables as a response to their affordability woes.

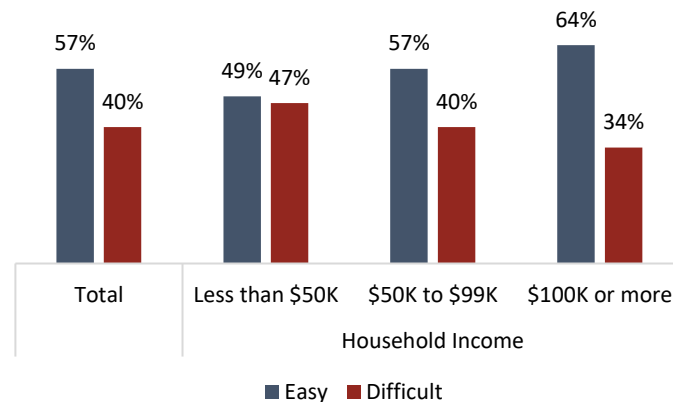
Moreover, half of lower-income Canadians say it would be difficult for them to afford to eat a diet based on the new food guide, which places greater emphasis on plant-based foods and less on meat as a source of protein. Despite unease about their ability to afford the new guide, Canadians generally find these goals worthwhile.

More Key Findings:

- Those who say they *struggle to feed their households* are twice as likely to say the Food Guide diet would be somewhat difficult (40% to 20%), and five times as likely (24% to 5%) to say it would be very difficult to afford, compared to those who say it is *easy to feed their household*
- Canadians are divided about diets. Half (48%) say it is easy to eat healthy if they try, while half (48%) say that even if they try, this is not easy to accomplish

*After respondent shown new Canada Food Guide diet recommendation

Do you feel that this type of diet, focused on fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grain foods and the selection of proteins recommended would be easy or difficult for you to afford?



METHODOLOGY:

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from March 20 – 25, 2019, among a representative randomized sample of 1,600 Canadian adults who are members of [Angus Reid Forum](#). For comparison purposes only, a probability sample of this size would carry a margin of error of +/- 2.4 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. Discrepancies in or between totals are due to rounding. The survey was self-commissioned and paid for by ARI. Detailed tables are found at the end of this release.

CONTACT:

Dave Korzinski, Research Associate: 250.899.0821 dave.korzinski@angusreid.org
Ian Holliday, Research Associate: 604.442.3312 ian.holliday@angusreid.org

- Further, six-in-ten Canadians (61%) say they have a hard time keeping track of what is healthy with changing diet trends. This response is most common among those ages 55 and older (68%)

About ARI

*The **Angus Reid Institute (ARI)** was founded in October 2014 by pollster and sociologist, Dr. Angus Reid. ARI is a national, not-for-profit, non-partisan public opinion research foundation established to advance education by commissioning, conducting and disseminating to the public accessible and impartial statistical data, research and policy analysis on economics, political science, philanthropy, public administration, domestic and international affairs and other socio-economic issues of importance to Canada and its world.*

INDEX:

Part 1: Costs and cutbacks

- **Impact of rising prices felt across all income levels**
- **Lower-income Canadians more likely to be cutting back**
- **Half say eating healthy is difficult due to costs**

Part 2: Canadians diets and health perceptions

- **Many struggle with diet trends**
- **Which foods do Canadians actively include or actively avoid?**

Part 3: Appraisal of the Canada Food Guide

- **What's in it?**
- **Is it affordable?**
- **Where does it provide value?**

Part 1: Costs and cutbacks

Rising food prices are nothing new in Canada. The Angus Reid Institute first canvassed [views on this issue](#) in 2016.

This year, the cost of groceries is [expected to grow](#) between 1.5 and 3.5 per cent – though the price of meat and seafood is expected to decline slightly due to reduced demand as many Canadians embrace alternative proteins.

That said, the average Canadian household is expected to pay roughly [\\$400 more](#) for groceries in 2019.

Impact of rising prices felt across all income levels

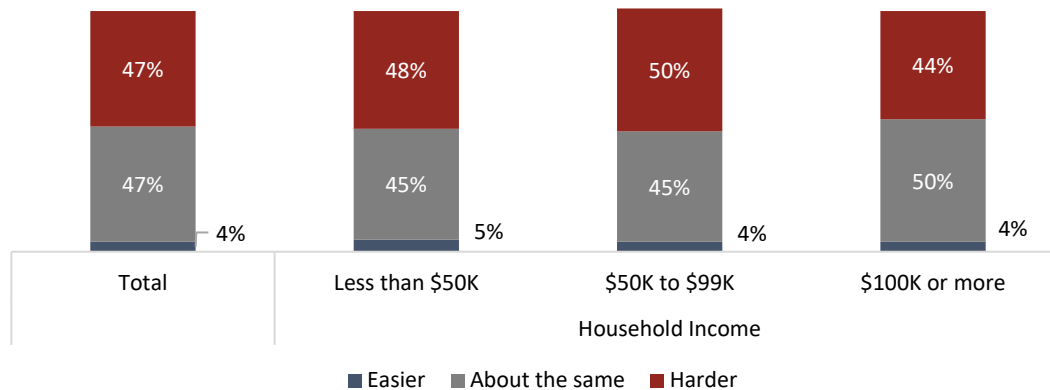
While food costs are rising, wages in Canada for the middle class have been [largely stagnant](#). Thus, it should come as little surprise that Canadians have concerns about affording their grocery bills. Nearly half (47%) say that they have had more difficulty affording food in the past year, with a significant level of uniformity seen across household income levels:

CONTACT:

Dave Korzinski, Research Associate: 250.899.0821 dave.korzinski@angusreid.org

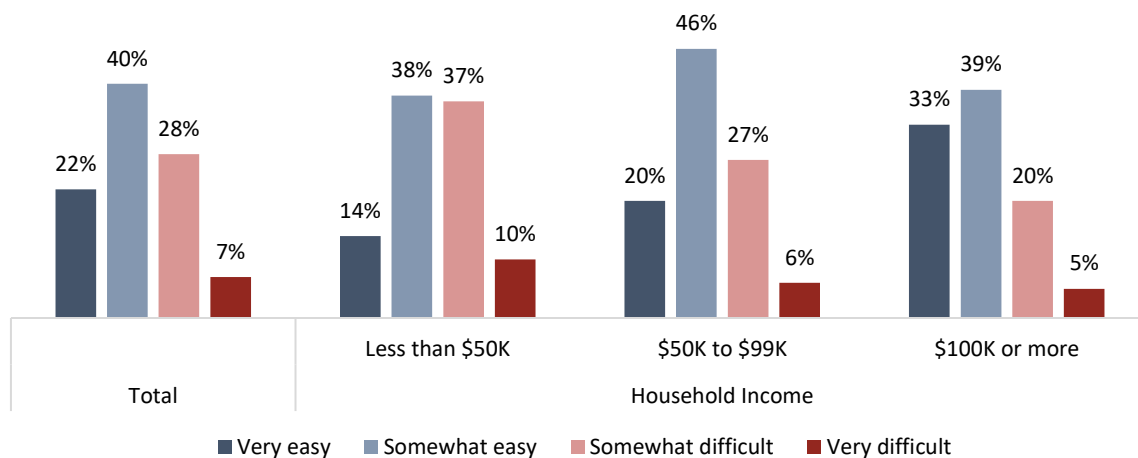
Ian Holliday, Research Associate: 604.442.3312 ian.holliday@angusreid.org

And, in the last year, would you say you've been finding it easier or harder to afford to feed your household?



Overall, about one-in-three Canadians (35%) say that they generally have a difficult time feeding their household, though this rises to close to half (47%) among those in the lowest income bracket:

Thinking about grocery shopping and your household's food budget, how easy or difficult would you say it is to afford to feed your household?



Lower-income Canadians more likely to be cutting back

Although a significant portion of Canadians of all income levels are saying that their grocery bills have been rising, different income groups are responding in different ways. For example, more than half of those with a household income below \$50,000 say that they have chosen less healthy options due to cost (55%) or cut back on meat (59%) – both much higher rates than those seen among respondents with

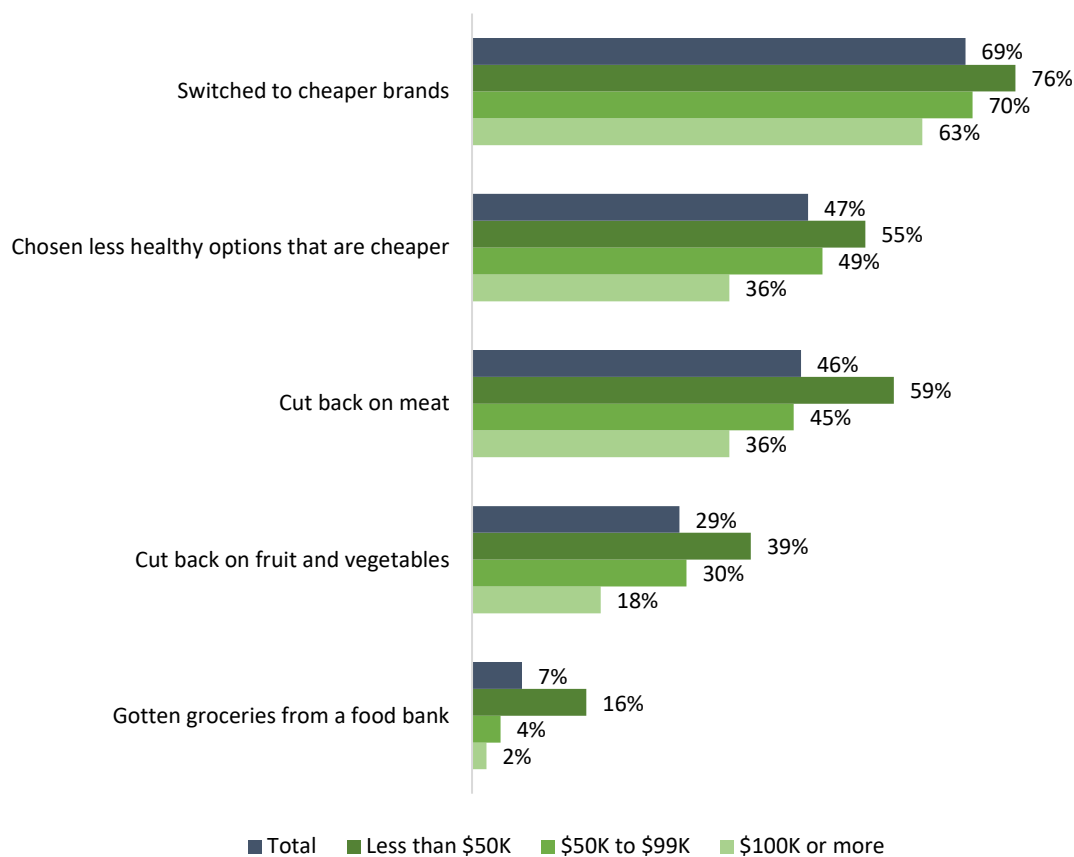
CONTACT:

Dave Korzinski, Research Associate: 250.899.0821 dave.korzinski@angusreid.org

Ian Holliday, Research Associate: 604.442.3312 ian.holliday@angusreid.org

higher household incomes. Lower-income Canadians are also four times more likely to have used a food bank in the past year (16% have):

Percentage of Canadians who have done the following in the past year due to rising food costs - By Household Income Level



Importantly, the roughly 35 per cent of the population that finds it difficult to feed their families is much more likely to have partaken in each of these cost-cutting measures. More than half of those in this group say they have cut back on vegetables (56%), while nine-in-ten say they have switched to cheaper brands (88%).

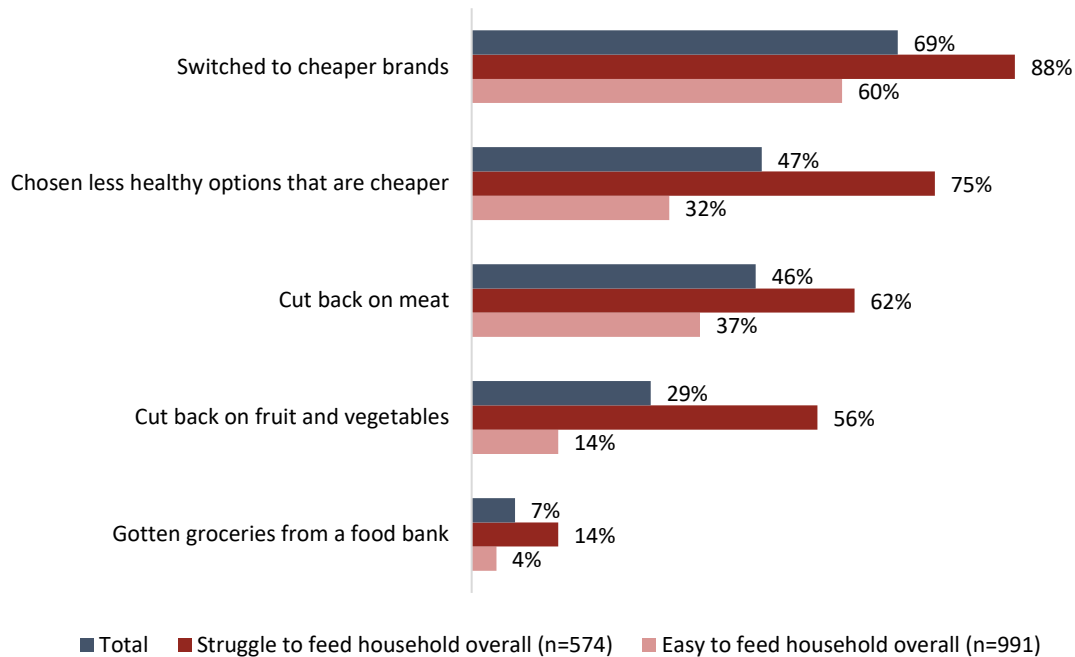
This suggests that many Canadians are eating less healthily than they would like due to the cost of higher-quality foods:

CONTACT:

Dave Korzinski, Research Associate: 250.899.0821 dave.korzinski@angusreid.org

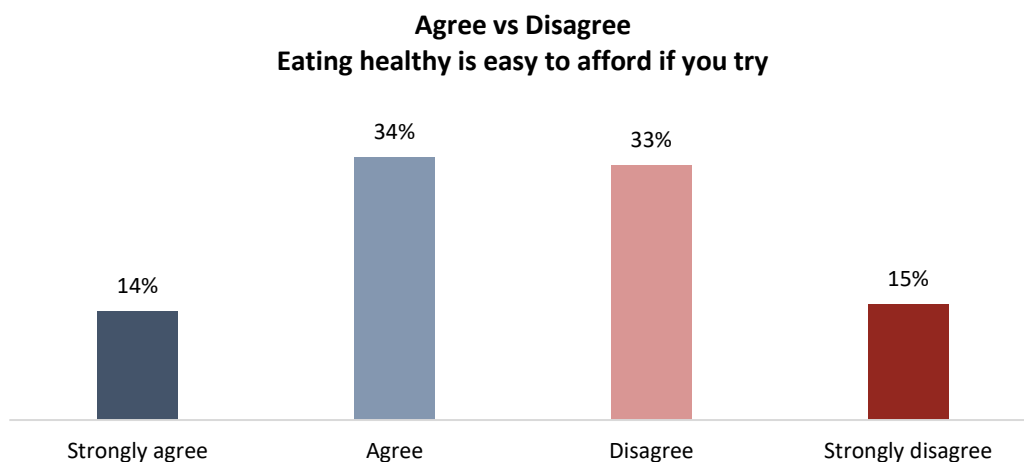
Ian Holliday, Research Associate: 604.442.3312 ian.holliday@angusreid.org

Percentage of Canadians who have done the following in the past year due to rising food costs



Half say eating healthy is difficult due to costs

Alongside some of these purchasing changes, many Canadians voice frustration over their ability to eat healthy more generally. Asked whether or not it is easy for them to afford to eat healthy if they try to, half (48%) disagree, suggesting that eating healthy is a challenge for them even with effort:



Asked to give an appraisal of their personal eating habits, one-in-five Canadians (21%) say they could be eating a lot healthier and half (48%) say they try to eat healthy when they can, while three-in-ten (31%)

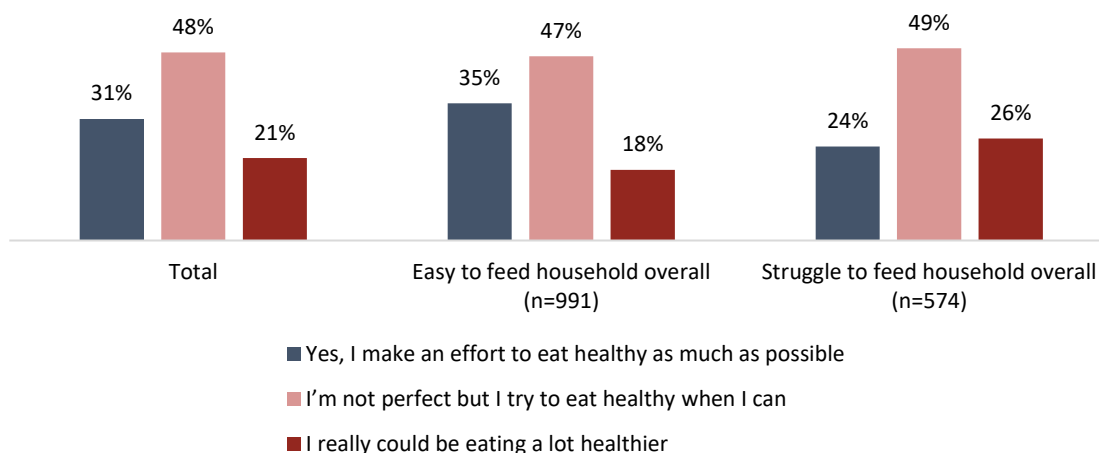
CONTACT:

Dave Korzinski, Research Associate: 250.899.0821 dave.korzinski@angusreid.org

Ian Holliday, Research Associate: 604.442.3312 ian.holliday@angusreid.org

say they are making a constant effort to eat healthy. The proportion of those who say they could be eating healthier rises to one-quarter among those who say it is difficult to feed their household:

Recognizing that we can't always eat "right" all the time, do you think, overall, that you eat a generally healthy or generally unhealthy diet?

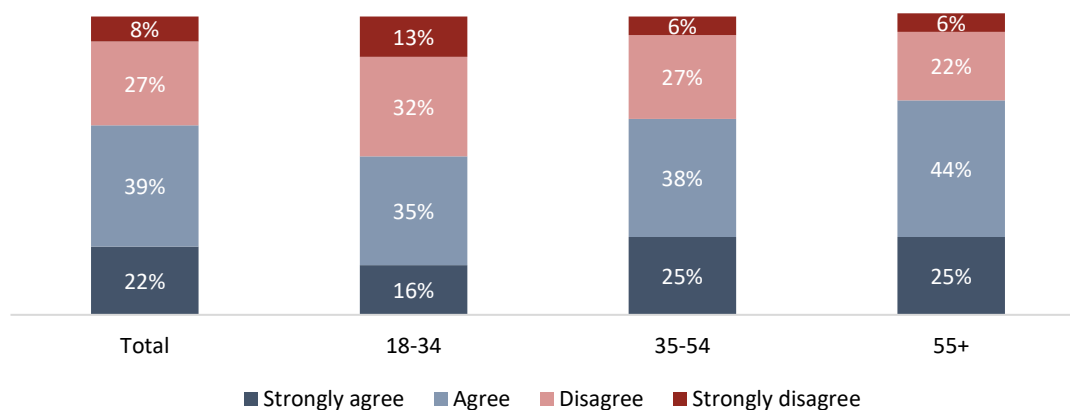


Part 2: Canadians diets and health perceptions

Many struggle with diet trends

Some of the difficulty for Canadians is keeping track of what they should be eating. In fact, six-in-ten Canadians (61%) say they have confusion over which diets are good or bad, as the information seems to be changing constantly. Diet trends appear to generate more confusion among older Canadians, though at least half of each age group say this is something they struggle with:

Agree vs Disagree
Diets are always changing, it's hard to keep track of what is "healthy"



CONTACT:

Dave Korzinski, Research Associate: 250.899.0821 dave.korzinski@angusreid.org

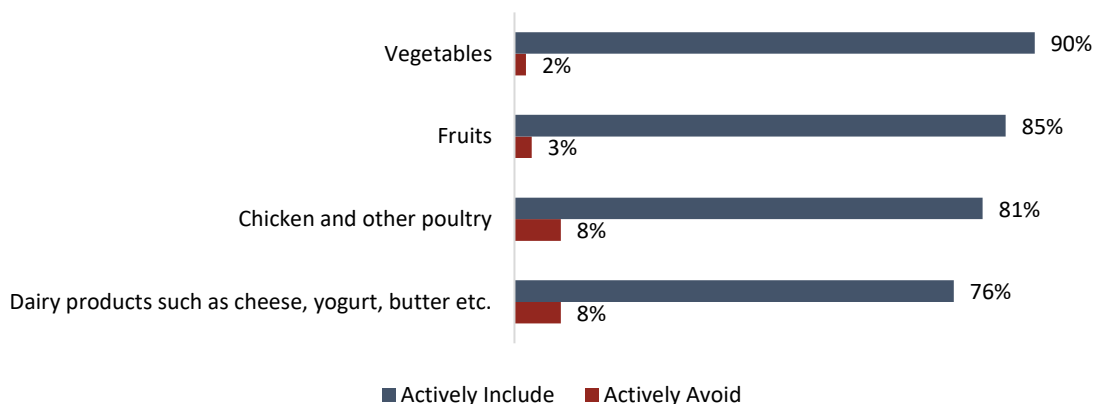
Ian Holliday, Research Associate: 604.442.3312 ian.holliday@angusreid.org

With both costs and confusion preventing many Canadians from achieving their ideal diet, it's worth exploring what types of foods they actually prioritize when deciding what to eat.

Which foods do Canadians actively include or actively avoid?

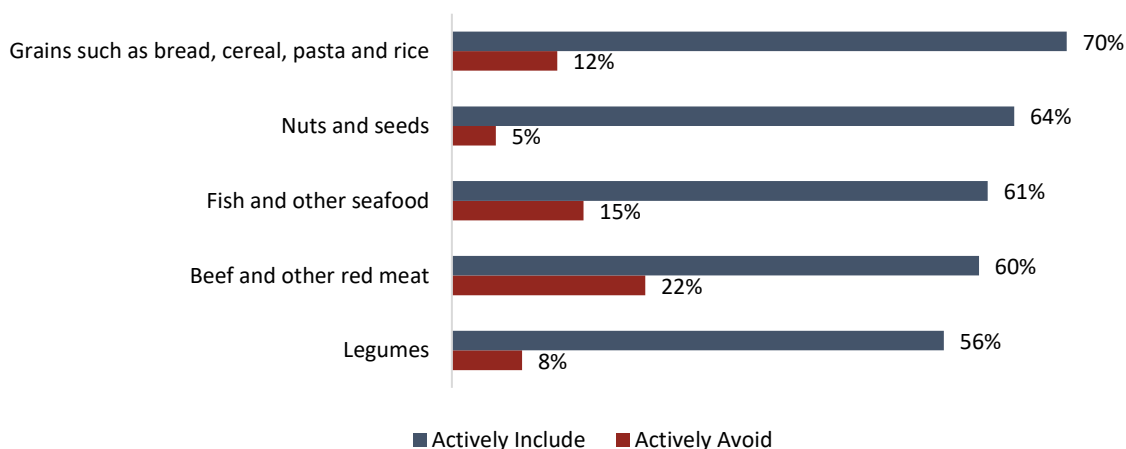
An element that adds to the troubling nature of Canadians cutting back on vegetables in order to reduce their food costs is the importance Canadians place on that food group. Vegetables are the food Canadians are most likely to be actively trying to include in their diet – nine-in-ten say they do so. Fruits (85%), chicken and poultry (81%) and dairy products (76%) are the other diet elements that Canadians are most inclined to add to their diets – with few actively avoiding each.

Percentage of Canadians who actively include or avoid each in their diet:



Five other foods are less-actively included, but relatively uncontroversial when it comes to Canadian eating habits. That said, one-in-five Canadians (22%) say that they do their best to avoid beef and other red meats.

Percentage of Canadians who actively include or avoid each in their diet:



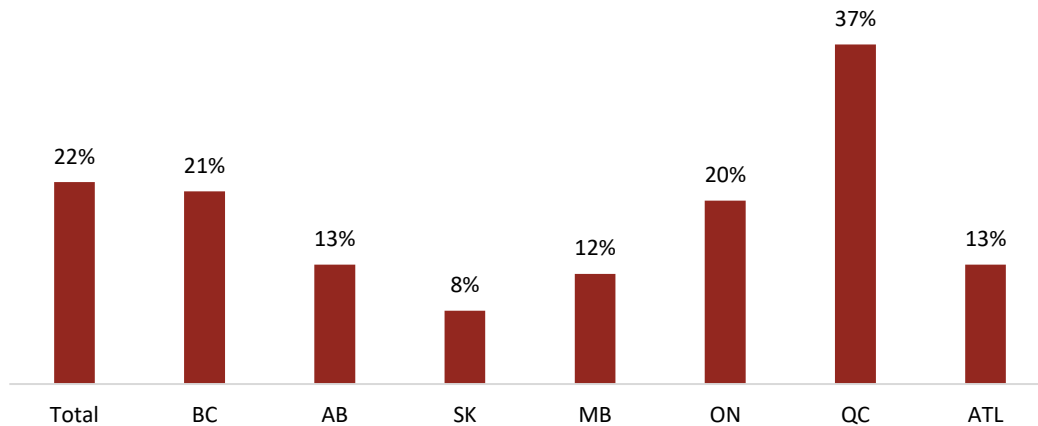
CONTACT:

Dave Korzinski, Research Associate: 250.899.0821 dave.korzinski@angusreid.org

Ian Holliday, Research Associate: 604.442.3312 ian.holliday@angusreid.org

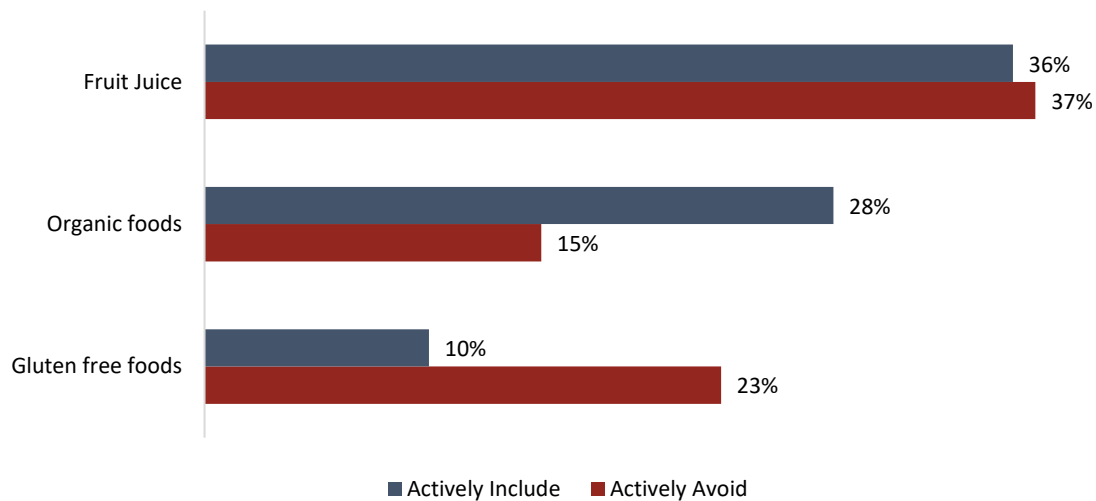
Interestingly, the largest differences of opinion on red meat are not generational or income-based, but regional. Residents of Quebec are substantially more likely to avoid these products, while those on the Prairies and in Atlantic Canada are especially *unlikely* to be avoiding them:

Percentage of Canadians who actively avoid beef and other red meat



The product Canadians are most likely to avoid – and one that has been the subject of [much debate](#) – is fruit juice. Respondents are divided evenly, with 36 per cent saying it is a part of their diet by design, and 37 per cent saying they actively avoid it.

Percentage of Canadians who actively include or avoid each in their diet:



The previous iteration of the Canada Food Guide counted a half-glass of fruit juice as equal to a serving of fruit or vegetables. This is not the case in the newly released version of the guide, which will be discussed in greater detail in the next section of this report. In fact, Health Canada, despite [intense lobbying](#) from beverage companies, removed fruit juice from the guide completely. Concerns in recent years have centered around the [high sugar content](#) in fruit juice. The guide now recommends water as the beverage of choice for Canadians.

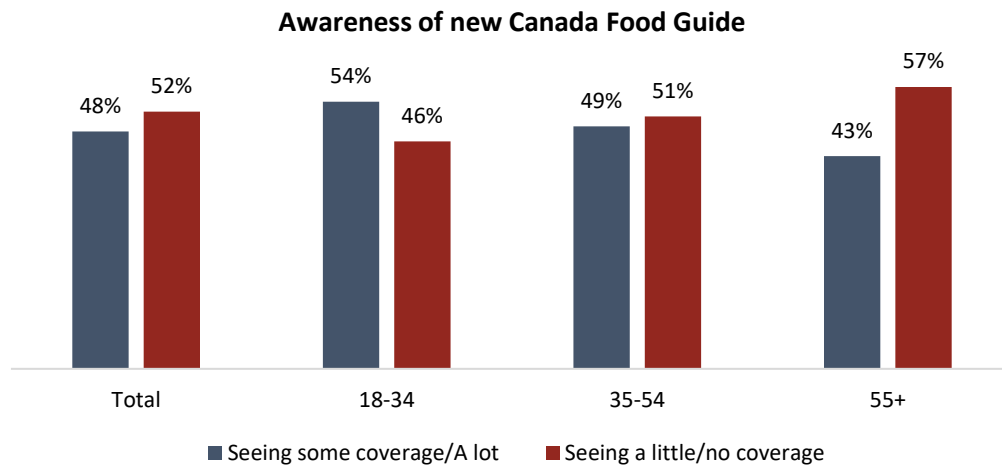
CONTACT:

Dave Korzinski, Research Associate: 250.899.0821 dave.korzinski@angusreid.org
 Ian Holliday, Research Associate: 604.442.3312 ian.holliday@angusreid.org

Part 3: Appraisal of the Canada Food Guide

The Canada Food Guide was updated this year for the first time since 2007. It serves as a handbook for schools, hospitals and community organizations in targeting relevant nutritional programs. The first iteration of this document, called Canada’s Official Food Rules, was composed in 1942 in an effort to help Canadians maximize their nutrition during wartime rationing.

While the program plays an important role in the lives of many Canadians, only about half of respondents paid significant attention to its release on [January 22](#).

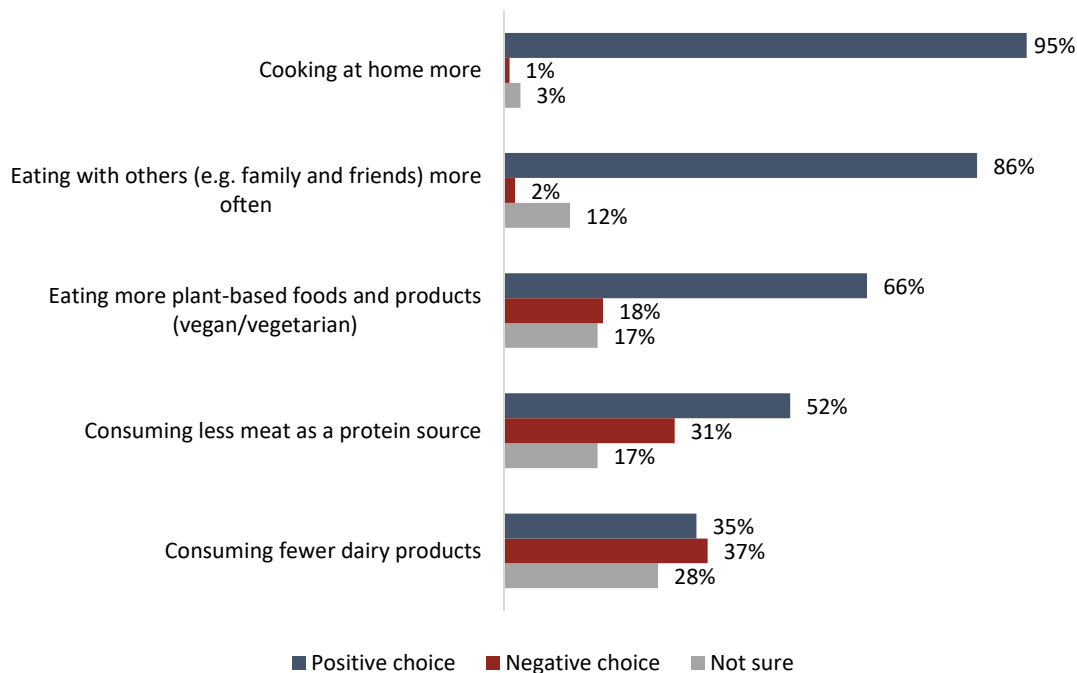


What’s in it?

There were a number of substantial changes made to this iteration of the Canada Food Guide. The program recommends a number of broad consumption or behavioural choices for Canadians.

Some of these changes, like cooking more food at home, eating with friends and family more often, or consuming more plant-based products, appear to be uncontroversial, based on the reactions of Canadians surveyed. Other changes are subject to more pushback, both from Canadians in this survey, and from industry representatives:

Is each of the following a positive choice or a negative choice for Canadians to make when it comes to cooking and/or eating habits:



Perhaps the most significant adjustment in the new Canada Food Guide is the elimination of dairy as an exclusive food group. [Much to the chagrin of Canada's supply-managed dairy sector](#), these products are de-emphasized and now exist as [one of many options](#) as a source of protein.

Related: Canadians assess supply management policy

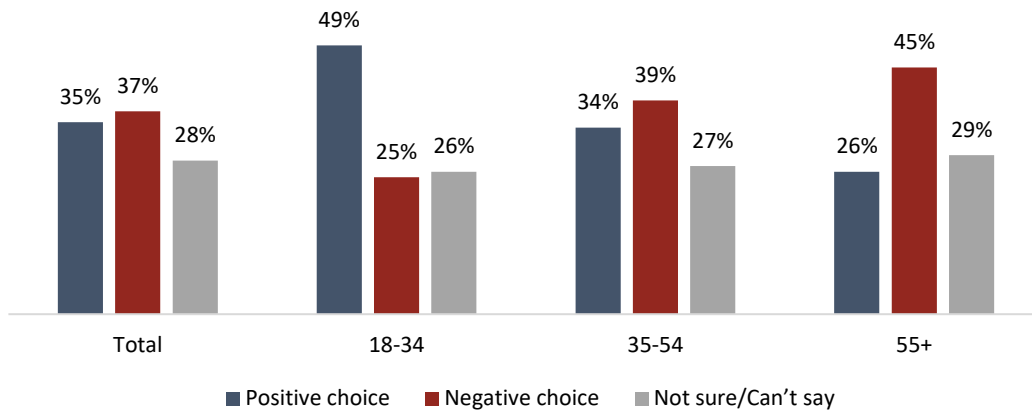
For their part, Canadians are largely uncertain of how to feel about the reduced prominence of dairy in their country's recommended diet. An equal number appear to believe this is a good choice (35%) and a bad one (37%), while three-in-ten say they are unsure (28%). The generational element on this finding is significant. Half of Canadians under the age of 35 say consuming fewer dairy products is a positive choice, while those 35 and older are more likely to disagree:

CONTACT:

Dave Korzinski, Research Associate: 250.899.0821 dave.korzinski@angusreid.org

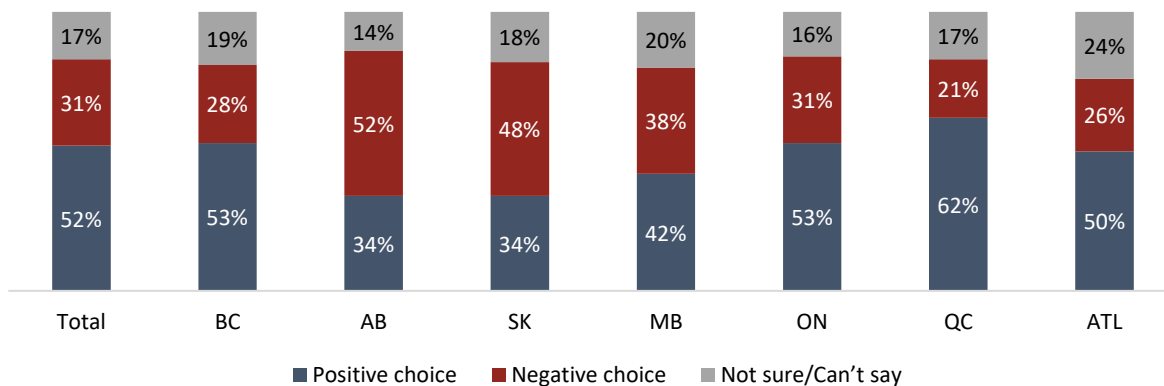
Ian Holliday, Research Associate: 604.442.3312 ian.holliday@angusreid.org

**Positive choice or negative choice:
Consuming fewer dairy products**



There is also a fair bit of pushback against the guide’s decreased emphasis on meat as a primary source of protein, with one-in-three (31%) Canadians saying this is a negative dietary choice. Albertans are most likely to disagree with the guide’s recommendation to consume less meat, perhaps reflecting the importance of the cattle industry to their region:

**Positive choice or negative choice:
Consuming less meat as a protein source**



Is it affordable?

In order to ascertain the affordability of the Canada Food Guide recommended diet for the average Canadian, the Angus Reid Institute showed respondents the guide itself before probing further.

CONTACT:

Dave Korzinski, Research Associate: 250.899.0821 dave.korzinski@angusreid.org
 Ian Holliday, Research Associate: 604.442.3312 ian.holliday@angusreid.org

Canada's food guide

Eat well. Live well.

Eat a variety of healthy foods each day

Have plenty of vegetables and fruits

Eat protein foods

Make water your drink of choice

Choose whole grain foods

Discover your food guide at Canada.ca/FoodGuide

Health Canada Santé Canada

Canada

Canadians were asked if the plate they see is something that they would be able to afford – a diet with a focus on fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grain foods, and a number of different protein selections.

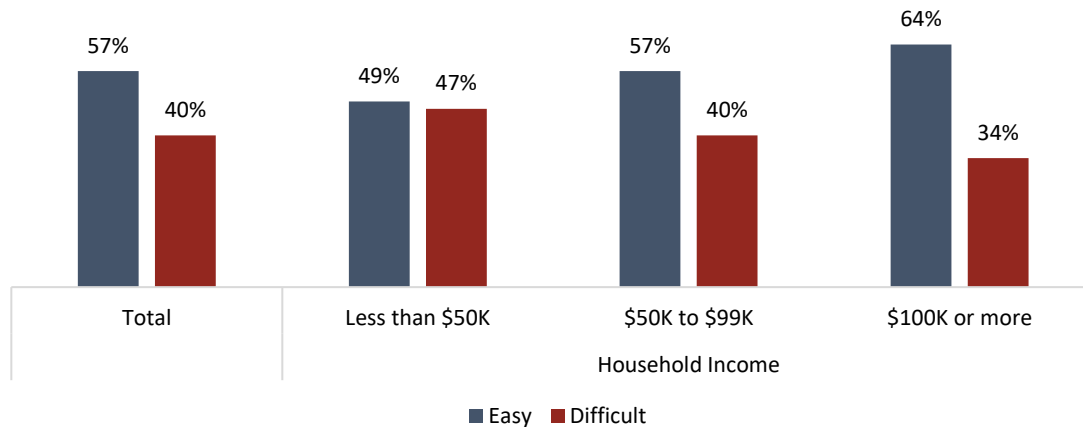
There is a significant portion of the population – about four-in-ten (40%) – who say that this would be challenging. This sentiment rises to half among the lowest income group but remains relatively high (34%) even among those with household incomes over \$100,000:

CONTACT:

Dave Korzinski, Research Associate: 250.899.0821 dave.korzinski@angusreid.org

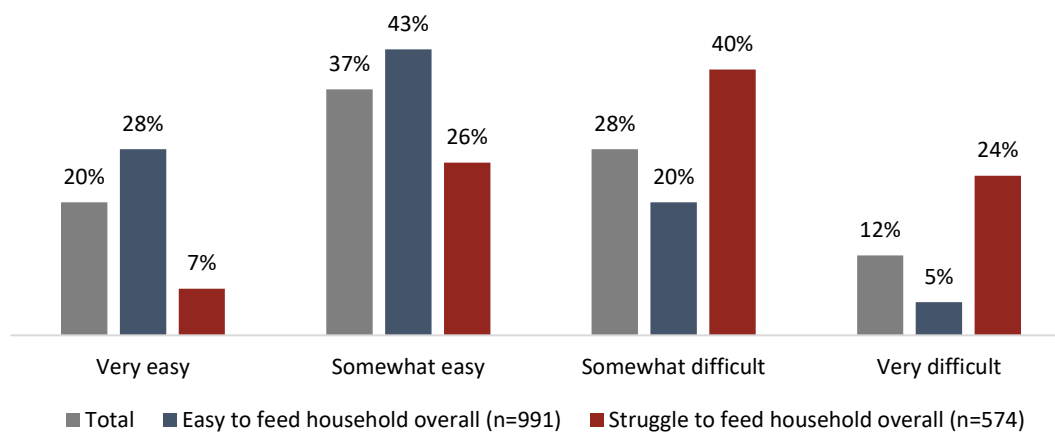
Ian Holliday, Research Associate: 604.442.3312 ian.holliday@angusreid.org

Do you feel that this type of diet, focused on fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grain foods and the selection of proteins recommended would be easy or difficult for you to afford?



Notably, those who earlier said they struggle to feed their households are twice as likely to say the Food Guide diet would be somewhat difficult, and five-times as likely to say it would be very difficult to afford.

Do you feel that a diet with a focus on fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grain foods and the selection of proteins recommended would be easy or difficult for you to afford?



Where does it provide value?

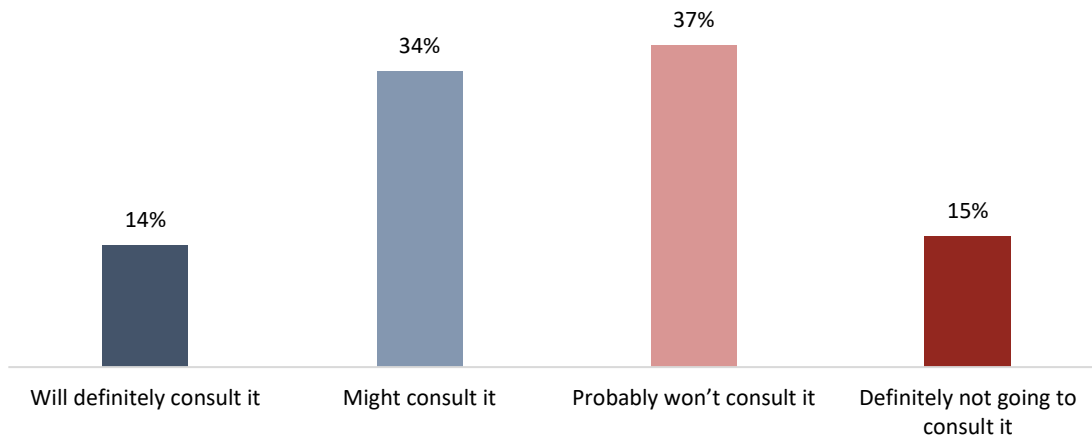
The value of the Canada Food Guide appears to be limited at a personal level. While just 14 per cent say they are definitely going to look at it for advice, another one-third (34%) say they may consult it. The other half of Canadians say it is unlikely the guide will be useful for them.

CONTACT:

Dave Korzinski, Research Associate: 250.899.0821 dave.korzinski@angusreid.org

Ian Holliday, Research Associate: 604.442.3312 ian.holliday@angusreid.org

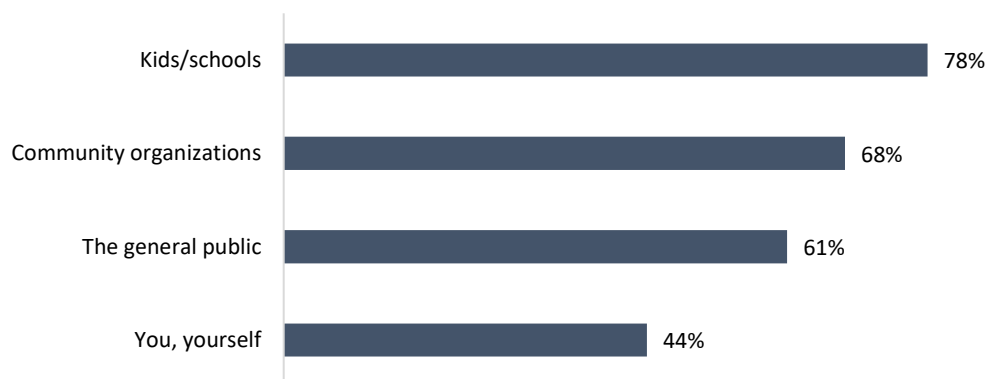
How likely would you say it is that you will consult and/or follow the Canada Food Guide when you're considering your diet and food choices you will make in the coming years?



Canadians are much more likely to see value in the Canada Food Guide for social service providers or educators. The guide is, in fact, the [second-most-requested](#) government document, after income tax forms. Most Canadians believe the guide has value for schools and creating diet plans for young children (78%) as well as community organizations involved in nutrition. The guide is [commonly used](#) by doctors and within hospitals. Fewer Canadians (44%) say the guide will be valuable to them, personally.

When you're thinking about the Canada Food Guide, whether previous versions or the newer one, how valuable do you think it is for the following people or groups?

Percentage of Respondents saying Valuable/Somewhat Valuable



*For detailed results by age, gender, region, education, and other demographics, [click here](#).
For other detailed results – difficulty affording groceries, change over past year – [click here](#).*

CONTACT:

Dave Korzinski, Research Associate: 250.899.0821 dave.korzinski@angusreid.org
Ian Holliday, Research Associate: 604.442.3312 ian.holliday@angusreid.org