

Price Check: Four-in-five say they've changed food buying habits because of increasing costs

Inflation crisis has one-quarter asking for supply management system to be relaxed

February 22, 2022 – As rising food prices take a bite out of Canadians' budgets, new data from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute finds four-in-five changing up their household's menu to keep up.

While three-in-five (62%) are eating out less and one-quarter are drinking less alcohol, a significant segment of Canadians are making changes to what they put in their cart to save money as grocery bills rise. Approaching half (46%) say they are switching to cheaper brands, one-third (35%) are cutting back on meat and one-in-five (21%) are buying less fresh fruit and vegetables.

Inflation isn't the only factor: Canada's system of supply management is also pushing prices upwards as [new, higher prices for farmers](#) for their milk and butter came into effect on Feb. 1.

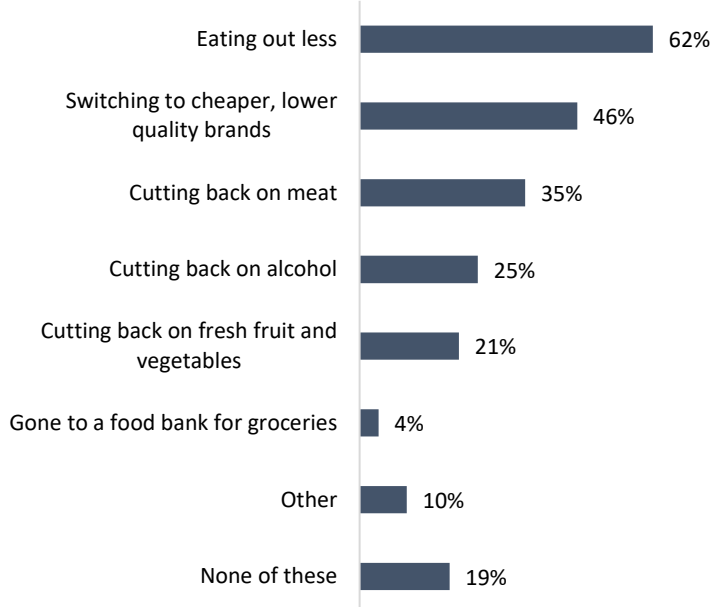
While Canadians broadly say they support supply management (68% do), there is significant interest in – at minimum – pausing its pricing requirements in the face of increasing food costs. One-quarter (27%) of Canadians say supply management policies should be relaxed in the face of rising grocery bills, while a further third (32%) believe the system should not exist in the first place. Two-in-five (40%) say the system should stay as is even as food prices continue to rise.

More Key Findings:

- For those with children under 13 in their household, nine-in-ten (89%) say they've changed up their food shopping habits in response to rising prices. That

Are you or your household doing any of the following more than usual because of food prices?

(All respondents, n=1,622)



METHODOLOGY:

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from Jan. 7 – 12, 2022 among a representative randomized sample of 5,002 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 +/- 2.0 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. Discrepancies in or between totals are due to rounding.

ARI conducted a second online survey from Feb. 11-13, 2022 among a representative randomized sample of 1,622 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 +/- 2.5 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

The survey was self-commissioned and paid for by ARI. Detailed tables are found at the end of this release.

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includes three-in-five (60%) who have switched to cheaper brands at the grocery store, more than the two-in-five (42%) of those without young children in their household who say the same.

- A majority in Saskatchewan (53%), Manitoba (53%) and Atlantic Canada (56%) say it is difficult to feed their household.
- Across the country, in every province a majority would like to see a temporary pause – or supply management be done away with completely.

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.*

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Part One: Canadians say they are changing up food buying habits as prices rise

Grocery bills have contributed to increasing money stress for Canadians as inflation continues to pressure their household finances. The coming year is not expected to offer a reprieve. The Bank of Canada said in January that the cost of food will likely continue to outpace overall inflation, which hit a 30-year high at the end of 2021. Poor local growing conditions, supply chain disruptions and high energy costs are to blame for the rising food prices, the central bank said.

Canadians have already felt the pinch in their wallet from rising food prices. In January, Statistics Canada reported that grocery bills increased up to 6.5 per cent in the 12 months previous, the fastest pace since 2009.

Two-in-five say feeding their household difficult

Many in lower income households say it is difficult to keep everyone fed. Two-thirds (64%) in the lowest income bracket say it is difficult to feed their household. For households earning \$100,000 or more annually, at least two-thirds say the opposite, that feeding their families is easy.

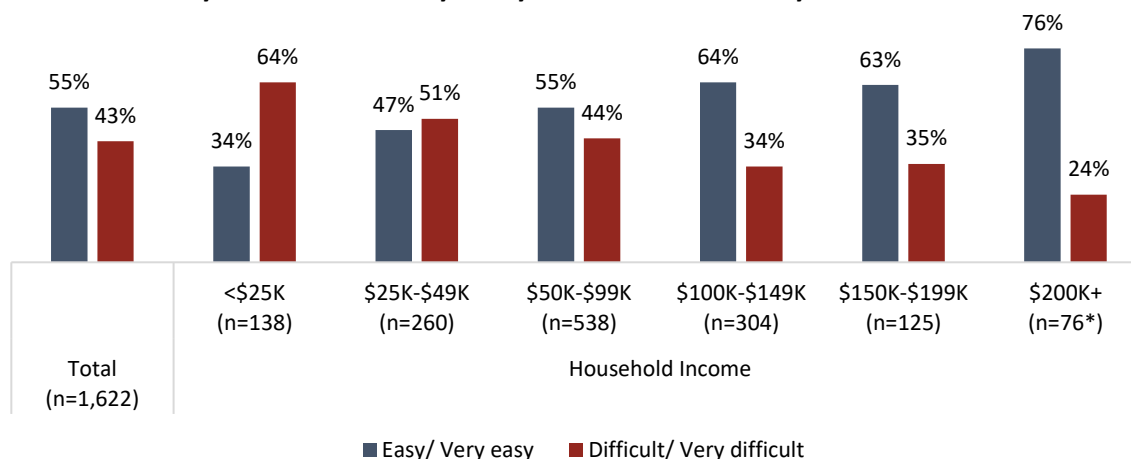
Overall, two-in-five (43%) of Canadians say grocery shopping is a struggle at the moment:

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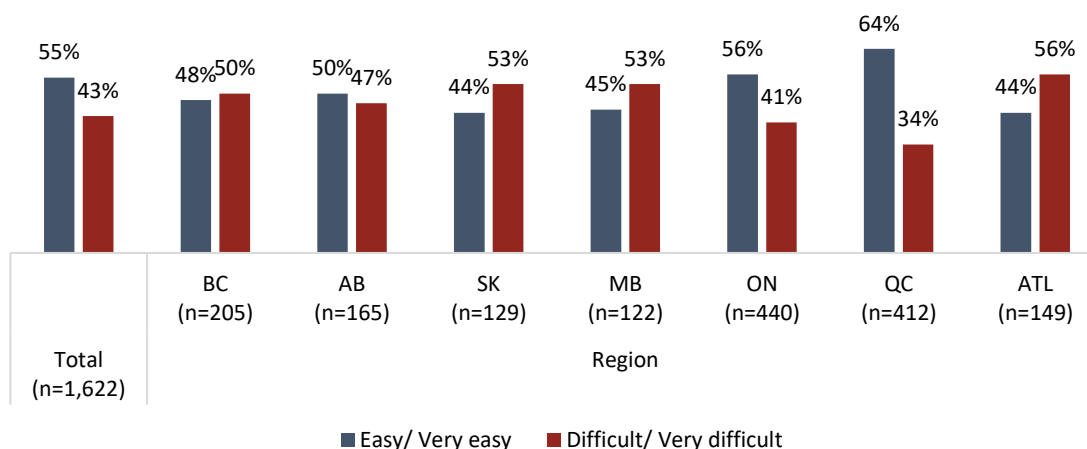
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Thinking about grocery shopping and your household's food budget, how easy or difficult would you say it is to afford to feed your household?



The grocery bill pain is not being felt equally across the country. Two-thirds (64%) in Quebec say it is easy to feed their family, the highest of any region. In Atlantic Canada, more are struggling – three-in-five (56%) say it is instead difficult to keep their family fed. Atlantic Canada is home to among the [lowest household income levels](#) in the country, and the relative challenges of reaching this portion of the country have evidently played a [role in exacerbating](#) this problem:

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?



Many switching to cheaper brands at the grocery store

To compensate for increased food prices, many Canadians have changed their food-buying habits. Three-in-five say they are eating out less and one-in-five say they are drinking less alcohol to help save money. When it comes to the grocery store, approaching half say they are switching to cheaper brands, one-third say they are cutting back on meat and one-in-five say they are cutting back on fresh fruit and

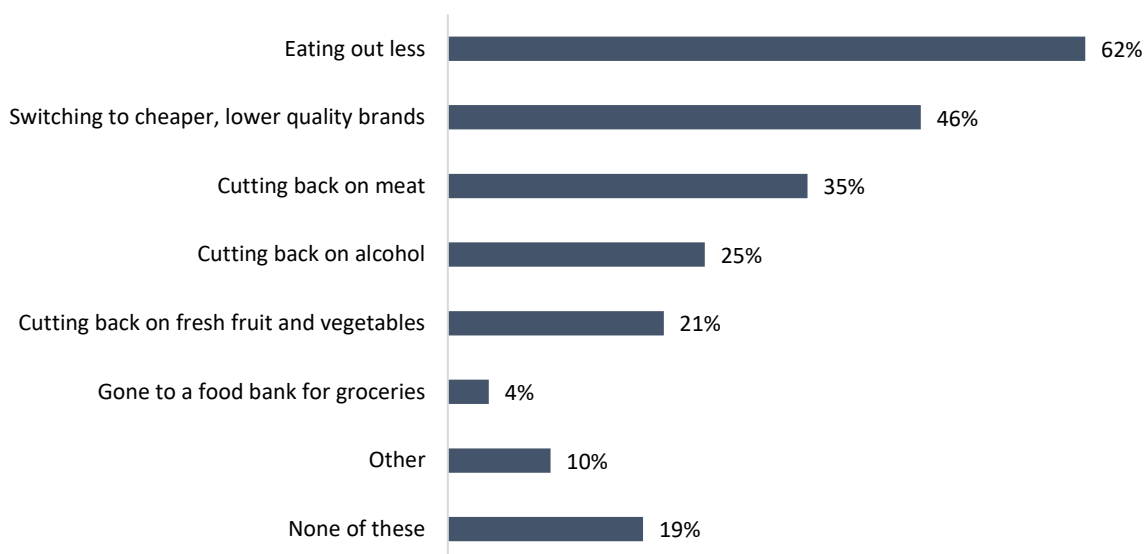
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vegetables. Few (19%) say they have not adjusted their behaviour to compensate for ballooning grocery bills:

**Are you or your household doing any of the following more than usual
because of food prices?
(All respondents, n=1,622)**



This consumer behaviour modification varies depending on the respondents' household income. While a majority across all income brackets say they are eating out less, those in lower income households are much more likely to be making cost-cutting decisions at the grocery store. Two-in-five (37%) in households earning less than \$25,000 annually say they've cut back on fresh fruit and vegetables.

The lowest income households are also least likely to report no change in behaviour at one-in-ten. Meanwhile, for households earning more than \$150,000 per year, one-third say their food buying habits have remained unchanged:

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Are you or your household doing any of the following more than usual because of food prices?							
	Total (n=1,622)	Household Income					
		<\$25K (n=138)	\$25K-\$49K (n=260)	\$50K-\$99K (n=538)	\$100K- \$149K (n=304)	\$150K- \$199K (n=125)	\$200K+ (n=76*)
Eating out less	62%	65%	69%	62%	63%	56%	52%
Switching to cheaper, lower quality brands	46%	59%	57%	46%	43%	29%	29%
Cutting back on meat	35%	41%	41%	39%	28%	28%	34%
Cutting back on alcohol	25%	29%	28%	27%	25%	21%	21%
Cutting back on fresh fruit and vegetables	21%	37%	27%	20%	14%	13%	16%
Gone to a food bank for groceries	4%	15%	6%	2%	1%	2%	2%
Other	10%	12%	12%	9%	9%	11%	5%
None of these	19%	10%	11%	20%	19%	33%	30%

**Smaller sample size, interpret with caution*

At least half of Canadians younger than 55 say they have switched to cheaper brands to offset rising food prices. Men aged 18- to 34 are the most likely group to have cut back on drinking to save money at one-third (36%). Meanwhile, men aged 55 and older are the most likely to say their household's food buying habits have remained consistent even as grocery bills rise:

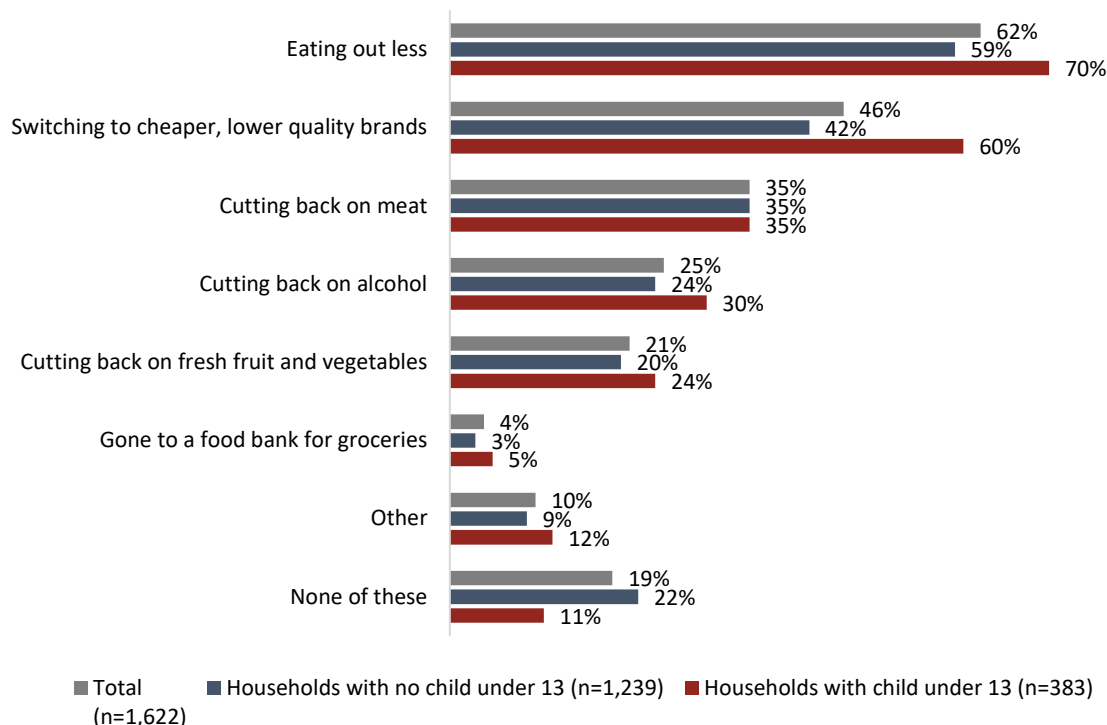
Are you or your household doing any of the following more than usual because of food prices?							
	Total (n=1,622)	Age and Gender					
		Male			Female		
		18-34 (n=228)	35-54 (n=268)	55+ (n=299)	18-34 (n=222)	35-54 (n=276)	55+ (n=329)
Eating out less	62%	65%	67%	55%	62%	65%	58%
Switching to cheaper, lower quality brands	46%	53%	51%	33%	60%	49%	37%
Cutting back on meat	35%	35%	32%	34%	39%	29%	41%
Cutting back on alcohol	25%	36%	26%	21%	26%	25%	21%
Cutting back on fresh fruit and vegetables	21%	21%	19%	20%	22%	24%	21%
Gone to a food bank for groceries	4%	3%	5%	1%	3%	7%	2%
Other	10%	7%	8%	6%	8%	17%	10%
None of these	19%	16%	15%	29%	15%	15%	23%

Those living in households with at least one child under the age of 13 are more likely to report changing their buying habits. Three-in-five (60%) say they are switching to lower quality brands and seven-in-ten (70%) say they are eating out less. One-in-ten (11%) say they haven't changed their food shopping habits, half the rate of those who live in households without children under the age of 13:

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Are you or your household doing any of the following more than usual because of food prices?



Part Two: Supply management

Should government relax rules in face of inflation?

Since 1972, Canada's dairy, chicken, turkey and egg production have been subject to supply management. This system of policies includes quotas to limit production, tariffs on foreign imports and set prices farmers receive for their shipments of goods. The system is designed to [protect Canadian farmers](#), but it also costs [Canadian consumers collectively an average of \\$2.6 billion per year](#), a fact that has [generated increased scrutiny](#) of the system with inflation dominating headlines in recent months.

The price floor set by supply management for Canadian farmers' dairy, egg and poultry products [increases the price Canadian consumers pay for these goods](#). And just recently, the farm gate price of milk – that is, the price farmers are paid for milk to sell to processors – has increased [by 8.4 per cent on Feb. 1](#). This adds to the pressure Canadians are facing from inflation, which drove grocery prices up in 2021 and [is expected to add nearly \\$1,000 to the average family of four's grocery bill in 2022](#).

When survey respondents were presented with an explanation of the system, as well as critiques and arguments for it ([see the questionnaire](#)). Seven-in-ten (68%) Canadians say they support the system ([see detailed tables](#)).

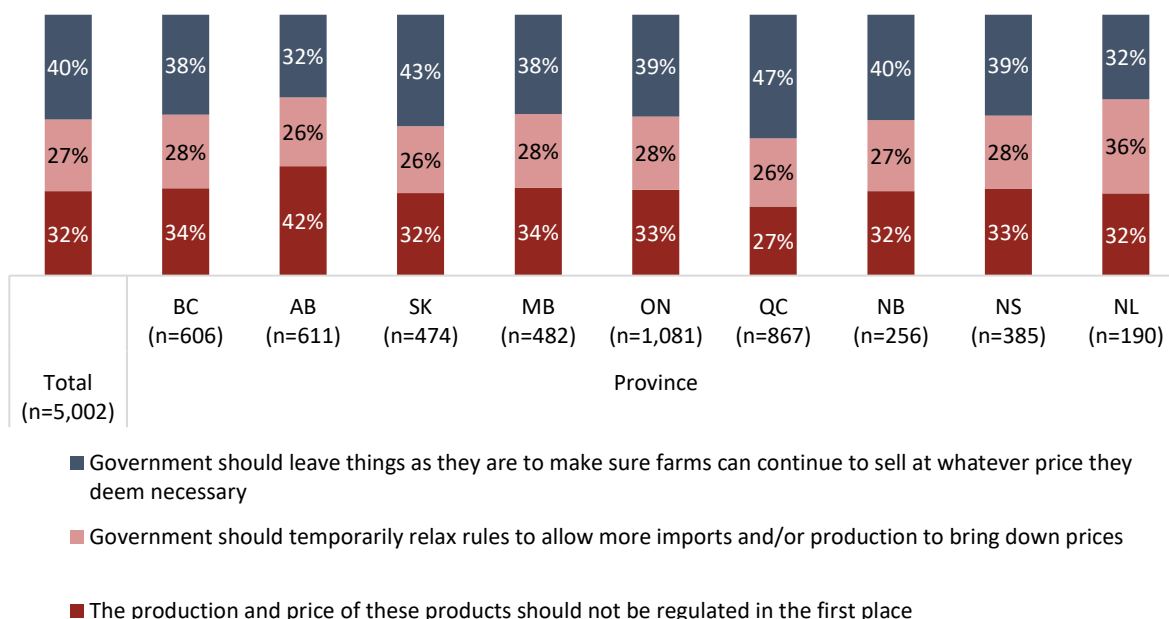
The struggle to put food on the table has led [some to recently argue](#) supply management should end, while others call to temporarily halt the system's price regulation. While many Canadians support the system generally, there is significant appetite for a temporary reprieve to lower food prices. A majority

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either agree with a short-term relaxation of fixed pricing (27%) – or that the system should not exist at all (32%):

Supply management and inflation:



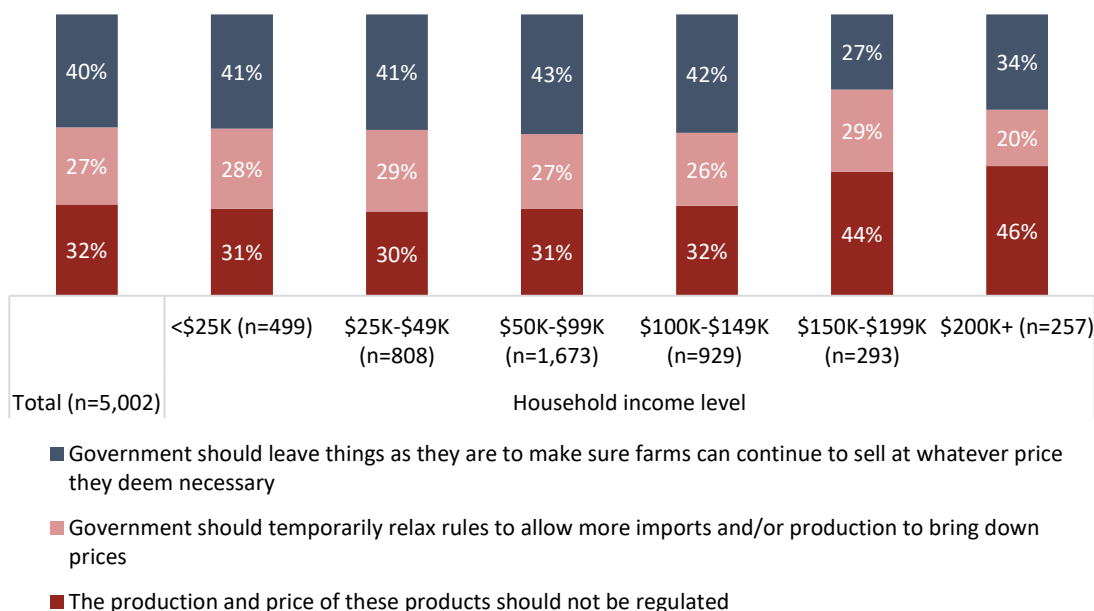
What is also notable in this discussion is the higher levels of support for deregulation among those who have higher household income levels. This, despite bearing a lower relative burden due to the higher prices:

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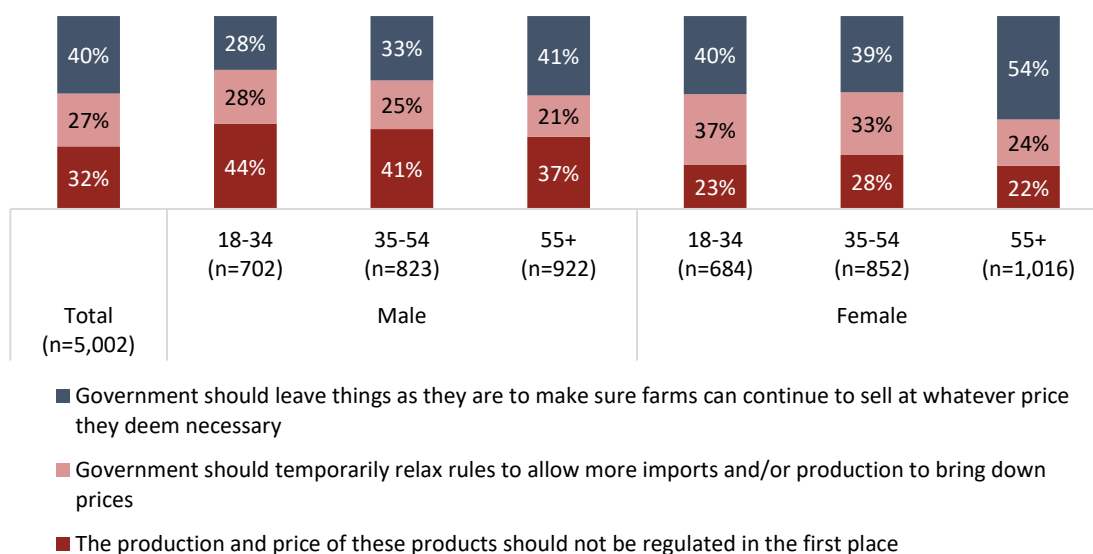
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Supply management and inflation:



There is also a gender and age divide in how Canadians would like to see the government deal with supply management in the face of inflation. Older Canadians are much more supportive of the policies continuing despite rising food prices, including a majority (54%) of women over the age of 54. Men aged 18- to 34-years-old are as likely to want to see the system paused (28%) as continue (28%) as grocery bills climb:

Supply management and inflation:

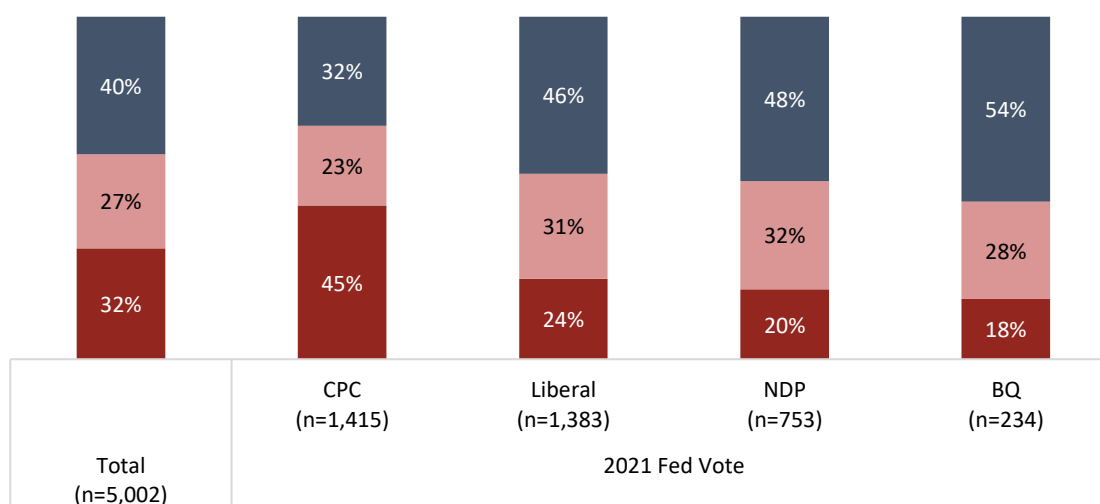


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The partisan split is also notable. Though more past CPC voters would like to see the system continue (32%) than be paused while Canada deals with inflation (23%), many aren't supportive of the system in the first place (45%). For past voters of the other major parties, a plurality believe supply management should stay in place, rising to a majority (54%) of those who voted for the Bloc Québécois in last fall's election:

Supply management and inflation:



- Government should leave things as they are to make sure farms can continue to sell at whatever price they deem necessary
- Government should temporarily relax rules to allow more imports and/or production to bring down prices
- The production and price of these products should not be regulated in the first place

For detailed results for part one by age, gender, region, education, and other demographics, [click here](#).

For detailed results for part one by whether or not the respondent has children under 13 in their household, [click here](#).

For detailed results for part two by age, gender, region, education, and other demographics, [click here](#).

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