

Food Safety News



Photo illustration

American's confidence in the safety of food hits record low

By Coral Beach on September 20, 2024

Two recent surveys of consumers show record lows in confidence of the safety of the U.S. food supply.

In a Gallup poll, 28 percent of survey respondents do not have much confidence, and 14 percent have "none at all."

In a survey by the International Food Information Council (IFIC), survey questions involved selected microbial concerns, such as the presence of E. coli and heavy metals in food, as the

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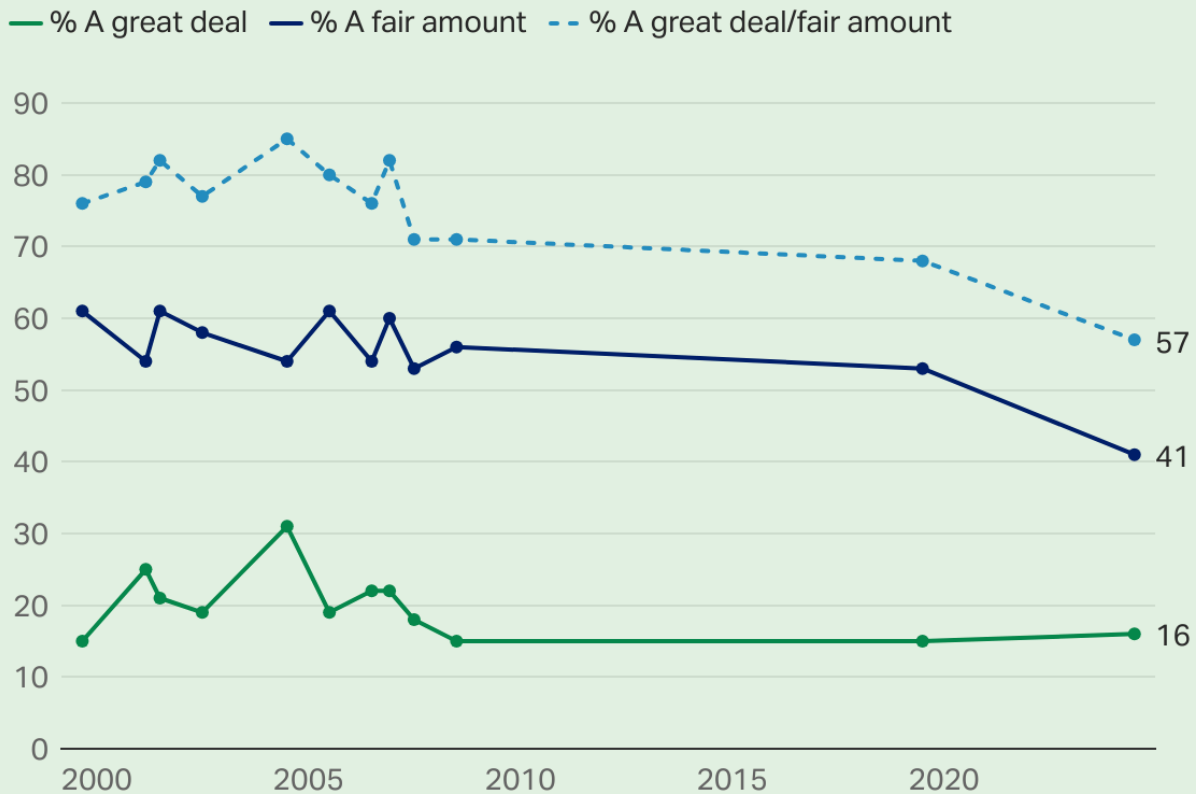
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Details from the Gallup poll

Data for the food safety questions was collected as part of Gallup's annual Consumption Habits poll, conducted July 1-21. It showed a record low in Gallup's trend dating back to 1999.

Americans' Confidence in Government to Ensure Safety of U.S. Food Supply

How much confidence do you have in the federal government to ensure the safety of the food supply in the U.S. -- would you say you have a great deal, a fair amount, not much or none at all?



Response categories "not much" and "none at all" are not shown.

percentage points compared to Gallup's reading in 2019.

From 1999 to 2006, roughly 80 percent of Americans believed in the government to ensure food safety. After the Salmonella outbreak in 2007, that dropped to 70 percent. Americans' confidence stayed near that level in 2008 and 2019 before dropping this year.



One of the largest drops in confidence was seen among parents of young children – 49 percent expressed confidence in the government's assurance of the food supply, down from 67 percent in 2019. Sixty percent of those who are not parents of young children maintain confidence, compared with 68 percent in 2019.

One survey question asked about the safety of food at grocery stores. Americans are less confident now than five years ago that the food available at most grocery stores is safe to eat. About 72 percent of respondents said they are very or somewhat confident, down from 81 percent in 2019.



Income and education brackets showed a difference in confidence, with more wealthy and better-educated people having higher confidence in food safety. Adults with an annual household income of \$100,000 or more (78 percent) and college graduates (75 percent) are two of the subgroups most likely to have confidence in food safety at grocery stores.

Younger people and those with less education are among the least confident in grocery store food safety. Among adults aged 18 to 34, 62 percent said they are optimistic that grocery store foods are safe, as do 69 percent of those with a high school education or less. Both figures are



Food recalls appear to have influenced people's attitudes about food safety. The Food and Drug Administration issued 19 product recalls in June 2024, just before the Gallup survey. Thirty-seven percent of adults report having thrown out or returned food in the past year in response to a product recall or food safety advisory.

Slightly more than half, 53 percent, have avoided buying certain brands or types of food because of a recall or advisory, and 26 percent say they have worried that they may have eaten contaminated food.

"When Gallup last asked about food safety in 2019, the U.S. government had issued more than 330 food recalls that year, including the viral FDA announcement that romaine lettuce was linked to an outbreak of E. coli infections. In the first six months of 2024, 578 food products were recalled," according to Gallup.

Details from the IFIC poll

The International Food Information Council (IFIC) commissioned an online survey among U.S. consumers to measure knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs about the safety of food ingredients. Data was collected from June 6-10, 2024, via an online survey of 1,000 Americans aged 18 to 80-plus, and responses were weighted to ensure proportional results.

The survey revealed that consumer confidence has reached an all-time low. Compared to the Gallup poll, the IFIC poll focused more on ingredients.

When provided a list of 11 ingredients, consumers indicated that dyes/colors are the most avoided, with 35 percent opting to steer clear of them actively. This was followed closely by sugar substitutes at 34 percent, MSG at 29 percent, bioengineered/GMO ingredients at 27 percent, and preservatives at 25 percent.

slot at 37 percent, followed by processed meats at 29 percent, and plant-based dairy alternatives at 27 percent.

“Interestingly, it’s not always a ‘glass half empty’ mentality. We find that Americans consider the health benefits of what they eat and drink (30 percent) more often than the health risks (8 percent),” IFIC Senior Director, Food Ingredient Communications, Tony Flood, explained.

“While we weren’t surprised that certain ingredients or foods carry a less desirable reputation, we were surprised that 1 in 4 Americans simply do not think about either the health risks or the health benefits of what they eat or drink,” Flood stated.

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