



SURVEY OF REGISTERED DIETITIANS: BETTER UNDERSTANDING CHALLENGES OF INCREASING FRUIT AND VEGETABLE CONSUMPTION

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The disease fighting characteristics associated with a diet rich in fruits and vegetables have been well established by decades of nutritional studies and research. However, according to the Centers for Disease Control, only one in 10 Americans eat enough fruits and vegetables each day. Barriers to consumption have also been researched and examined over the years in an effort to remove or overcome them. There has been increasing concern, however, that some messaging, marketing tactics and media reports may have created a relatively new consumption barrier – fears about the safety of fruits and vegetables. Concerns about a “fear barrier” impacting consumption had been anecdotal until substantiated by peer reviewed studies published in 2014 and 2016. While both studies showed the potential impact of a “fear barrier” on consumption, the Alliance for Food and Farming (AFF) wanted to learn more from the nutrition community about their real-life experiences related to improving eating patterns. Therefore, the AFF fielded a survey with the objective to better understand the challenges faced by registered dietitians (RDs) and nutritionists to increase consumption of fruits and vegetables in the daily diets of their clients and consumers. Our goal is to share these results with the nutrition community and engage in further dialogue about how we can work together to break down consumption barriers with a specific focus on alleviating safety fears.

Here is a brief overview of the survey results:

Points of Agreement Among Surveyed RDs:

- It is important that consumers know that conventionally-grown fruits and vegetables are safe to eat because not all consumers feel they can afford organically-grown produce. **95% agreement.**
- Fear-based messaging regarding pesticide residues has a negative impact on consumers because it causes concerns about whether conventionally-grown fruits and vegetables are safe to eat. **94% agreement.**
- Consumers should eat more fruits and vegetables every day, whether it’s organic or conventionally-grown. Both are safe and can be eaten with confidence. **93% agreement.**
- Activist messaging about pesticide residues has the most negative impact on lower-income consumers who may or may not be able to afford organic fruits and vegetables. **76% agreement.**

When compared to the other statements which had close to unanimous agreement, there was a drop in overall agreement with the final statement. However, 76% represents two-thirds of the respondents and is significant. This statement also had the highest amount of respondents stating they were “unsure” which may correlate to their reaction to “most negative impact on low-income consumers.” They may have felt, for example, that other audiences are equally impacted.

Consensus on Barriers to Consumption:

There was also consensus among RDs about the importance of factors impacting if consumers eat enough fruits and vegetables each day.

- Cost – 100%
- Convenience - 98%,
- Preparation skills - 91%
- Taste - 96%
- Food safety concerns – 63%

When asked specifically to identify the biggest food safety concerns among consumers in an open-ended question, “pesticides/chemicals/GMOs” and “bacterial/fungal contamination such as E.coli and Salmonella” were the most frequently cited by the RDs. Since the science and government sampling data repeatedly show that residues “pose no food safety concern,” these open-ended survey responses underscore how misinformation may be impacting public health efforts to improve diets.

What Fear-Based Messaging Discourages Consumption?

Survey respondents were asked to consider how negative food safety information impacts consumers and consumption: These included:

- The “dirty dozen” list of fruits and vegetables, **81% responded this discourages consumption.**

- News reports of foodborne illness outbreaks, **87% responded this discourages consumption.**
- Labeling of genetically modified crops/GMOs, **64% responded this discourages consumption.**

We also showed the RDs infographics used by activist groups to promote one farming method over another. After reviewing an infographic disparaging a popular fruit with inaccurate residue safety messaging, 95% of the RDs agreed that this visual discourages consumption. An infographic showing the so-called “dirty dozen” list led 88% to agree that this discourages consumption.

Credibility of Information Sources on Food Safety:

The AFF asked RDs who they found to be credible sources of information about residues on fruits and vegetables.

- Other RDs/Nutritionists – 99%
- Academia/Scientists - 97%,
- U.S. Department of Agriculture - 94%,
- Federal Food and Drug Administration - 93%
- Environmental Protection Agency - 92%
- Farmers - 87%

Interestingly, produce trade associations were found to be much more credible (78%) than activist or environmental groups (63%) when it comes to information about pesticide residues.

Learn more about the results of the survey among RDs as well as recommendations from a review panel of RDs at safefruitsandveggies.com/for-dietitians.

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