

THE AMERICAN FOOD JOURNEY REPORT

A Pulse on How Much We Know About The Food System and What We Eat



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OVERVIEW

Our current reality in the United States is that fresh, nutritious and affordable food is endangered.

Over the last 50 years, local farm stands have been systematically replaced with factory food to the detriment of our health, communities and planet. Additionally, our produce is being treated with harmful pesticides and hauled across the country only to arrive nutritionally lacking – with almost half going to waste before it ever reaches the plate.

Are Americans aware of the nutritional and environmental effects of the U.S. food system? How much do Americans know about the food they're eating? How do Americans shop for – and consume – fresh produce?

To answer these questions and more, Lettuce Grow and The Farm Project polled 1,500 U.S. residents over the age of 18 to determine how much Americans actually know about the state of our food system and the food we consume every day.

Our findings show that **Americans are largely unaware of the extent of the issues currently affecting our food system in the United States.** Additionally, when it comes to general attitudes about eating well, we found **most Americans value fresh food and eating healthy – but their actions, and awareness, don't always map back.**

ATTITUDES

VS.

ACTIONS

80% of respondents feel it is important that their fruits and vegetables are grown locally

Americans' **SECOND MOST IMPORTANT FACTOR** when purchasing produce is that it's high in nutrients

67% of Americans are concerned with how many human touchpoints their produce has

60% admit they don't know where the produce from their local grocery store is grown and only **1 IN 10** proactively shop local by frequenting farmer's markets.

70% still purchase most of their produce from grocery stores, even though it's lacking in nutrients by the time it hits the shelves

1 IN 5 MILLENNIALS only wash their produce when they're in the mood



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FOOD SYSTEM KNOWLEDGE GAPS

To understand the gaps around how much the average American adult knows about our overall food system, we set out to determine the level of consumer knowledge on three key issues facing our food system today – food waste, nutrient loss and food miles.

We found that although **87% of adults believe our food system has an impact on the environment** – and **half (49%) make it a priority to teach their kids to be more eco-conscious at home** – the reality is the typical American knows very little about the issues our current food system presents.

When it comes to food waste – the number one contributor to landfills today – respondents believe we contribute much less than we actually do.

30%

of respondents think we waste 100 pounds of food per year, when it's actually triple that – at 300 pounds¹

71%

have no idea how much money the average family of four wastes on unused food each year (\$1,800)² – with 41% believing we waste much less

On average, how much nutritional value does produce lose within 3 days of being harvested? When asked this question, **the majority of respondents (65%) didn't know that produce loses 30% of its nutrients.**³ Almost **1 in 7 respondents (13.5%) believes produce only loses 5% of nutrients when it actually loses 6x that.**

Another major issue of our food system that most Americans are unaware of is produce's long journey to the grocery store.

1 IN 4 RESPONDENTS

believe their produce only travels 150 miles before reaching the grocery store, when it is actually 8x that distance (1,200 miles)⁴

¹ [THE STATE OF AMERICA'S FOOD WASTE REPORT, 2016, EAT RIGHT FOUNDATION](#)

² [ROADMAP TO REDUCE FOOD WASTE BY 20%, 2016, REFED](#)

³ [EXCELLENCE IN FRUIT & VEGETABLE QUALITY REPORT, 2013, UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA](#)

⁴ [FOOD TRANSPORTATION ISSUES AND REDUCING CARBON FOOTPRINT, W. WAKELAND ET AL.](#)



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PRIORITIES & PURCHASING BEHAVIORS

When asked about the most important factors when purchasing produce, Americans prioritized affordability over ensuring that it was fresh and grown without pesticides – which doesn't map back to the value placed on eating well. Additionally, after saving money on food, Americans' second most important factor was that their produce is high in nutrients. However, given a lack of understanding of the food they eat, their shopping habits don't map back.

Without realizing that **produce loses 30% of its nutrients before hitting grocery store shelves**³, respondents have yet to adjust their shopping behaviors to match their produce priorities.

75% of American adults still purchase most of their produce from grocery stores

Even when it comes to America's most popular fruit, respondents have a general lack of understanding around the shelf life, believing it should be measured in days instead of weeks...or sometimes months.

92% of Americans have no idea that the average apple at their grocery store is over 10 months old

When it comes to purchasing produce in-store, **67% of Americans are concerned with how many human touchpoints their produce has**. However, their at-home cleanliness habits differ based on their mood at any given point in time. Additionally, some respondents admit to washing their produce solely out of habit.

1 IN 5

Millennials only wash their produce when they're in the mood



1 IN 7

Adults wash their produce – but say they don't actually know why



³ EXCELLENCE IN FRUIT & VEGETABLE QUALITY REPORT, 2013, UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA



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MISALIGNED BUYING & EATING HABITS

When it comes to buying local, Americans “talk the talk” but don’t “walk the walk.”



80%

of respondents feel it is important that their fruits and vegetables are grown locally – and 30% prioritize it as “very important”

However, although there is a general understanding that locally grown produce is often better for overall health and wellness, most Americans don’t take the next step to find out the origin of the produce they purchase.

60%

admit that they don’t know where the produce from their local grocery store is grown

Furthermore, only **1 in 10 adults proactively shop local by purchasing the majority of their produce from farmer’s markets.**

After bringing their purchased produce home, respondents’ eating habits (and wasting habits) remained misaligned. When asked about their top reasons for eating leftovers, **66% of Americans cite avoiding wasting food as their top reason to eat leftovers** – but **nearly 1 in 7 adults say they throw food away because they just didn’t want to eat it.** On the positive side, people are prioritizing their ability to gauge freshness over recommended expiration dates in order to avoid wasting food.

74%

of Americans will eat food past its expiration date, if it still looks fresh

Lastly, although Americans prioritize their healthy eating, many don’t have a sense for what’s actually in the processed foods they eat. In fact, 19% of Americans rarely or never read the ingredients list on the foods they purchase.



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PANDEMIC IMPLICATIONS & PRIORITIZING HEALTHY EATING

The COVID-19 pandemic has undoubtedly prompted life-altering and long-lasting changes in the lives of Americans – from rapidly adopting new technology to learning how to work from home. Pandemic-fueled change also extended to Americans' eating habits.

39% of respondents stated that they started to eat healthier during the pandemic

In addition to adults prioritizing their own healthy eating, respondents have strong feelings about their partners' eating habits as well.

88% of Americans think it is important that their significant other prioritizes eating healthy foods – with **46%** believing it's very important

Additionally, while both sexes agree it should be a priority, **more men (51%) than women (42%) find it very important that their partner eats healthy.**

The pandemic also spurred people around the world to try their hand at growing their own produce – a hobby that not only eased concerns around food security amidst the lockdown but also served as a relaxing, family-friendly activity – and sparked a greater appreciation for food.

75% Of respondents that grow their own produce stated that it makes them appreciate food more





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CREATING ADVOCATES FOR CHANGE

This report has shown that Americans don't fully understand our current food system, the food they're eating or the food they're wasting. However, Lettuce Grow – an initiative of The Farm Project – was born to help reconnect people to their food through education and solutions that enable Americans to have healthier interactions with their food and our planet.

INFORMING AMERICANS & CREATING ADVOCATES FOR CHANGE

[Lettuce Grow](#) furthers the mission of [The Farm Project](#) by making it simple and fun for anyone to bring healthy, sustainable and abundant harvests into their home – without needing the time, space, or green thumb.

Lettuce Grow has created a community of connected growers who are effectively working towards building the world's largest distributed farm. To date, the Lettuce Grow Farmstand has helped users collectively grow **1,156,000 fruits and veggies**, recycle **1,098,000 ocean bound plastic milk jugs**, and save **23,123,000 gallons of water**.

Through a partnership with the [Whole Kids Foundation](#) and other community organizations, Lettuce Grow's [Lettuce Give](#) program supports schools and community organizations in need. Thus far, Farmstands have been donated to hundreds of organizations – a number that grows weekly.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE (GENERATIONS)

Lettuce Grow and The Farm Project came to life when founders and co-parents **Jacob Pechenik** and **Zoey Deschanel** started their family and began to think about what goes into the foods their children eat, and how that food was produced. They soon learned about all the challenges in the food system – from additives and processed foods to toxic chemicals and food miles – and knew that there must be a better way. Similar to our founders, respondents also felt the importance of informing the next generation – and creating opportunities for lasting change.

92%

of adults believe it is important that children learn about being environmentally-conscious – with 45% believing it's extremely important

THANK YOU

For more information about Lettuce Grow, please visit www.lettucegrow.com.

For more information about The Farm Project, please visit www.thefarmproject.com.

To receive more insight or executive commentary on the survey findings, please contact Lettuce Grow at LettuceGrow@shiftcomm.com.

