

WHAT WILL VEGETARIANS EAT? ACCEPTABILITY OF FOODS AND FOOD PRODUCTION METHODS TO VEGANS, VEGETARIANS, AND THOSE EATING AT LEAST ONE VEGETARIAN MEAL WEEKLY

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ABSTRACT

What will vegetarians eat? Acceptability of foods and food production methods to vegans, vegetarians, and those eating at least one vegetarian meal weekly

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BACKGROUND: Standard definitions of “vegetarian” and “vegan” become challenging when food production factors are considered. For example, should vegetarian items cooked on surfaces where meat has been cooked be considered “vegetarian”? Our objective was to determine attitudes of vegans, vegetarians, and those eating at least one vegetarian meal weekly towards some foods and food production methods. **METHODS:** Harris Interactive conducted a telephone survey within the U.S. in March, 2012, among a cross-section of 2,030 adults. 936 respondents who ate one or more vegetarian meals per week were categorized as vegetarian, vegan, or eater of some vegetarian meals. Respondents were asked about foods they would purchase if they wanted a vegetarian product. Choices included veggie burgers cooked on a grill where meat is cooked, veggie sandwiches from a non-vegetarian restaurant, desserts containing sugar potentially produced using bone char, and meat alternatives produced using animal DNA obtained long ago. **RESULTS:** Approximately half of respondents would purchase veggie sandwiches from a non-vegetarian restaurant (54% of all vegetarians including vegans; 47% of those eating some vegetarian meals). Vegans were less likely to purchase a product containing sugar produced using bone char than were other vegetarians (3% vs. 26%). Few respondents would purchase a meat alternative produced using animal DNA (11% overall). Many respondents would purchase a vegetarian dish containing leafy green vegetables (74%) or whole foods such as lentils or rice (67%). **CONCLUSION:** Attitudes of vegans, vegetarians, and individuals who eat some vegetarian meals affect food choices and can lead to avoidance of some seemingly “vegetarian” foods and the addition of other foods. This information should be taken into consideration for product development, labeling purposes, working with individual clients, and for establishing food-service and food production procedures. A related survey, focusing on product labeling, is being conducted and will provide additional information.

INTRODUCTION

Modern food production methods can create significant challenges for vegetarians and others who are interested in avoiding products containing animal-derived ingredients. Ingredients such as sugar processed with bone char and meat alternatives grown from animal cell DNA may or may not be acceptable to vegetarians. Food production practices involving preparation of non-vegetarian foods in the same kitchen or on the same equipment used to prepare vegetarian items may not be acceptable to some vegetarians. Our objective was to determine attitudes of vegans, vegetarians, and those eating at least one vegetarian meal weekly towards some foods and food production methods.

METHODS

Vegetarians, vegans, or those eating one or more vegetarian meals weekly were identified, based on foods eaten/not eaten, from a telephone survey conducted by Harris Interactive in March, 2012 (n=936). All respondents were U.S. adults. They were asked:

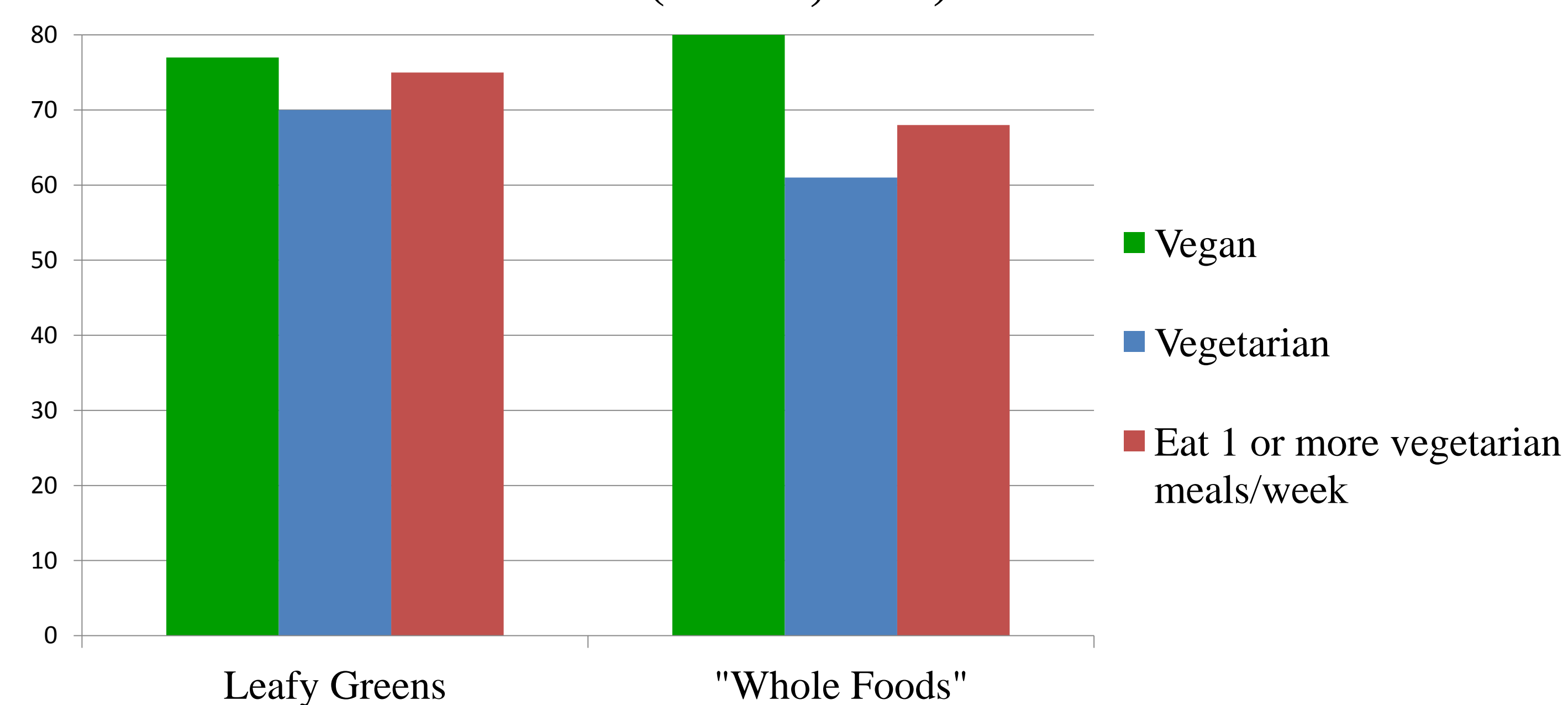
If you're looking to buy a vegetarian product, you would purchase: (Select all that apply.)

1. Your favorite veggie burger cooked on the same grill where meat is cooked, if the grill is cleaned first.
2. A vegetarian vegan deli slice sandwich in Subway.
3. Your favorite dessert containing sugar, if the source of sugar isn't specified.
4. A vegetarian dish containing leafy greens such as broccoli, kale, or collards.
5. A vegetarian dish containing whole foods such as lentils, chickpeas, or rice.
6. A meat alternative grown from animal cell DNA obtained ten years ago, which does not currently involve the raising of animals.
7. Your favorite dessert containing sugar whitened through a bone char filter, if bone char is not in the sugar.
8. None of the above



RESULTS

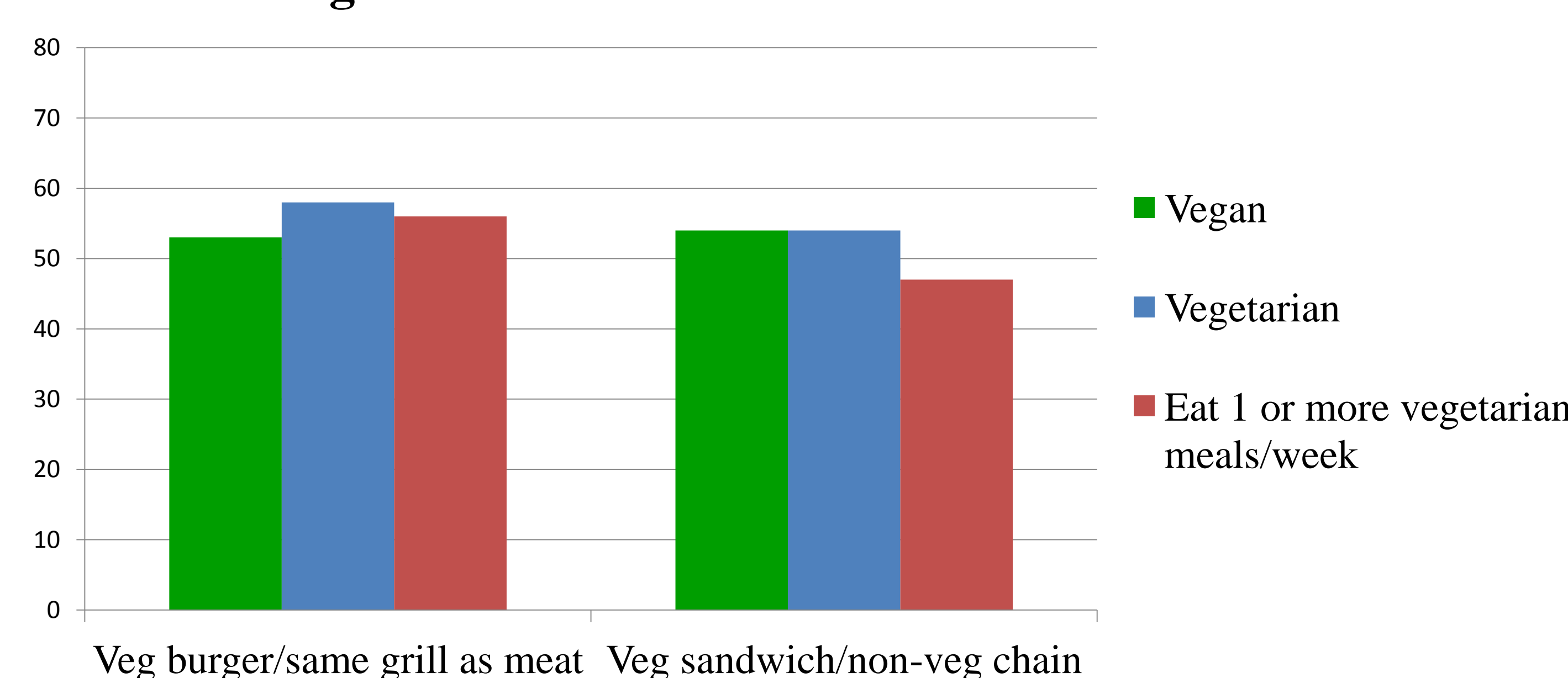
% of Respondents who would Purchase a Vegetarian Dish Containing Leafy Greens or a Vegetarian Dish Containing “Whole Foods” (beans, rice)



Implications: The majority in this audience are interested in purchasing dishes made with green leafy vegetables such as kale and collards. Dishes made with beans and grains are also apparently preferred. Restaurants, foodservices, and food production companies should take this into consideration.

Despite the interest of many respondents in whole foods and green vegetables, not all vegetarians, vegans, and those eating vegetarian meals appear to prefer foods that are often identified as part of a health-promoting vegetarian diet. Healthcare professionals should not assume that vegetarians or those who prefer vegetarian foods are choosing green vegetables, whole grains, and dried beans.

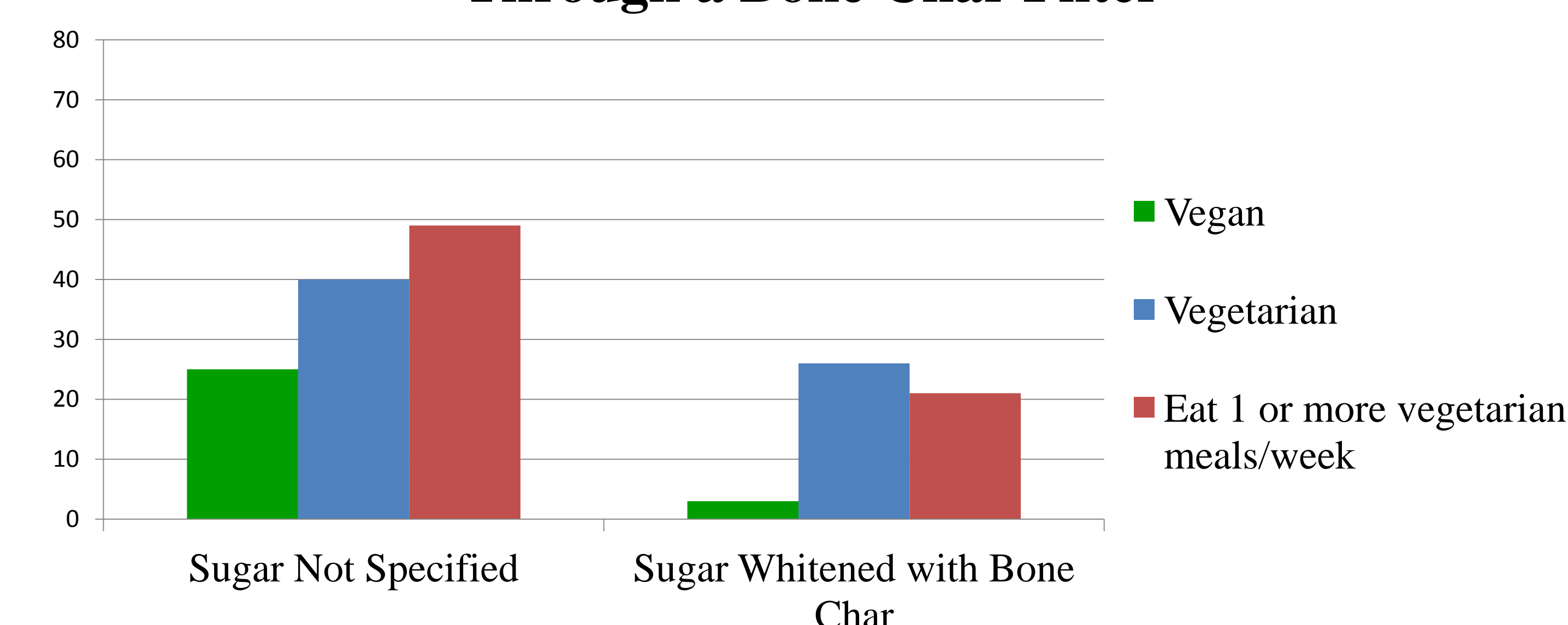
% of Respondents who would Purchase a Veggie Burger Cooked on a Grill where Meat is Cooked, if the Grill is Cleaned First OR who would Purchase a Vegan Deli-Slice Sandwich at a Non-vegetarian Chain Restaurant



Implications: About half of respondents will purchase a veggie burger cooked on the same grill where meat is cooked, if the grill is cleaned first. Since people have different views, this suggests the importance of labeling and disclosure so customers can make their own decisions. Options instead of cooking a veggie burger on the same grill where meat is cooked include using a microwave or separate pan on the grill.

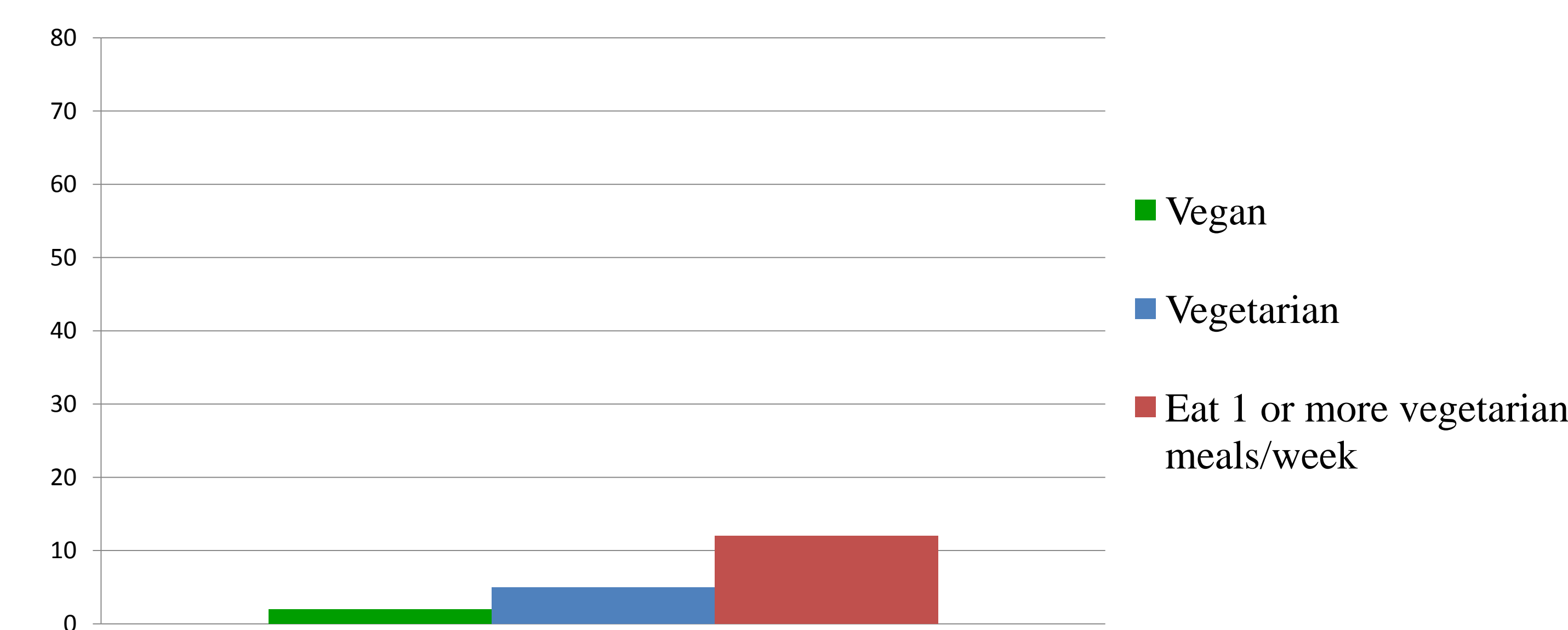
Many fast-food chains and restaurants have added vegetarian burgers. About a half of those eating vegetarian meals would also buy a sandwich made with vegan deli slices. It makes sense for restaurants and food services offering veggie burgers to take this next step and add and promote another sandwich product.

% of Respondents who would Purchase a Favorite Dessert Containing Sugar if the Sugar Source is Not Specified OR who would Purchase a Favorite Dessert Containing Sugar Whitened Through a Bone Char Filter



Implications: Some vegetarians and vegans will not eat products containing white sugar because of concern about the sugar being processed through bone char. Others do not want to eat sugar at all or only will eat certain types of sugar for health or political reasons. Vegans are least likely to eat sugar from an unspecified source or to eat sugar that has been processed using bone char. Many in the other groups also avoid sugar whose source is not specified or sugar processed with bone char.

% of Respondents who would Purchase a Meat Alternative Grown from Animal Cell DNA Obtained Ten Years Ago



Implications: The majority of respondents would not purchase a meat alternative grown from animal cell DNA obtained ten years ago, and which does not currently involve the raising of animals. Although this technology is being explored, it seems as if consumers are not ready for these products.

CONCLUSIONS

Attitudes of vegans, vegetarians, and individuals who eat some vegetarian meals affect food choices and can lead to avoidance of some seemingly “vegetarian” foods and the addition of other foods. This information should be taken into consideration for product development, labeling purposes, working with individual clients, and for establishing food-service and food production procedures.