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CONSUMER FOOD INSIGHTS

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INTRODUCTION

Consumer Food Insights (CFI) is a monthly survey of more than 1,200 American adults from across the country. Since January 2022, the Center for Food Demand Analysis and Sustainability (CFDAS) at Purdue University has used this survey to track trends and changes in consumer food demand and food sustainability behaviors.[1] Visit purdue.ag/CFDAS or contact cfdas@purdue.edu for more details.

In this edition, we explore the last three years of CFI data disaggregated by U.S. Census region: (1) Northeast, (2) Midwest, (3) South and (4) West.[2] Additional questions this month measure consumer perceptions of seed oils, which have come into the spotlight in recent months. Interested in additional insights from the CFI survey? Reach out to see how CFDAS can help unwrap your questions!

KEY INSIGHTS FROM APRIL

- 67% of American adults rate their diet 7-10 or "thriving" on the diet satisfaction ladder; diet well-being and happiness remain high.
- 66% of households list a seed oil as their most commonly used oils or fats for cooking.
- 20% of consumers actively try to avoid cooking with seed oils, up from 18% last year.
- Most consumers (53%) agree that seed oils are safe to consume as part of a balanced diet; perception is generally positive or neutral.
- Agreement about healthfulness does not vary substantially based on where respondents have seen information on seed oils.

FOOD HAPPINESS	+0*
86%	

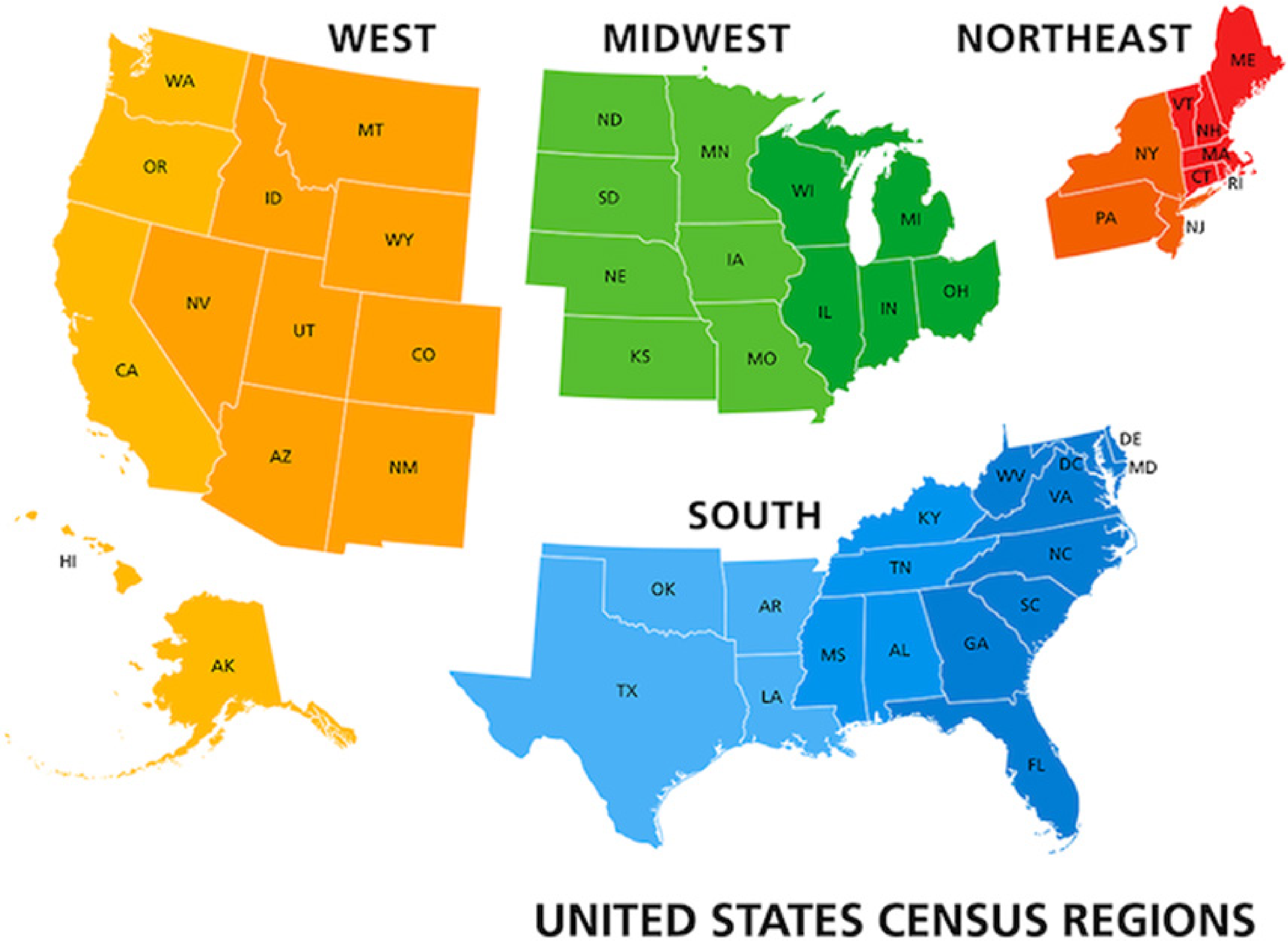
FOOD INSECURITY	+0
13%	

FOOD SPENDING	-2
$194 /WEEK	

GROCERY STOCKOUTS	-2
10%	

*+/- in upper right corner tracks the unit change in the statistic from the previous month or quarter, depending on data collection frequency

Figure 1. U.S. Census regions, Apr. 2025



PERCEPTIONS OF SEED OILS

What oils and fats do consumers primarily use when cooking?

Figure 2 summarizes the most common oils and fats used by consumers when preparing food at home. Olive oil (67%), butter (47%) and vegetable oil (40%) top the list. Animal fats, such as ghee, lard, tallow and duck fat are less commonly used in the kitchen. Seed oils (e.g., canola, vegetable, corn, soybean, peanut and sesame) were in 66% of respondents' top 3.

When asked how familiar they are with the term "seed oils", 40% of respondents report either never having heard of the term or having heard of the term but not knowing what they are. A little under half (46%) of consumers are familiar with the term and generally have an idea of what seed oils are, and 14% are very familiar with the term (**Figure 3**).

Figure 3. *"How familiar are you with seed oils?"*, Apr. 2025

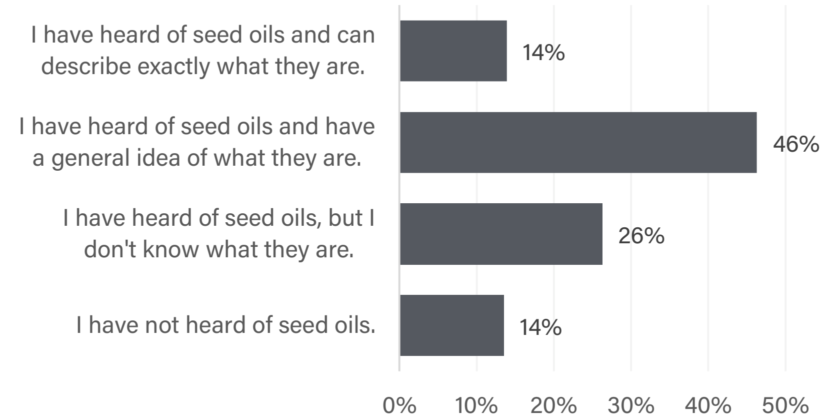
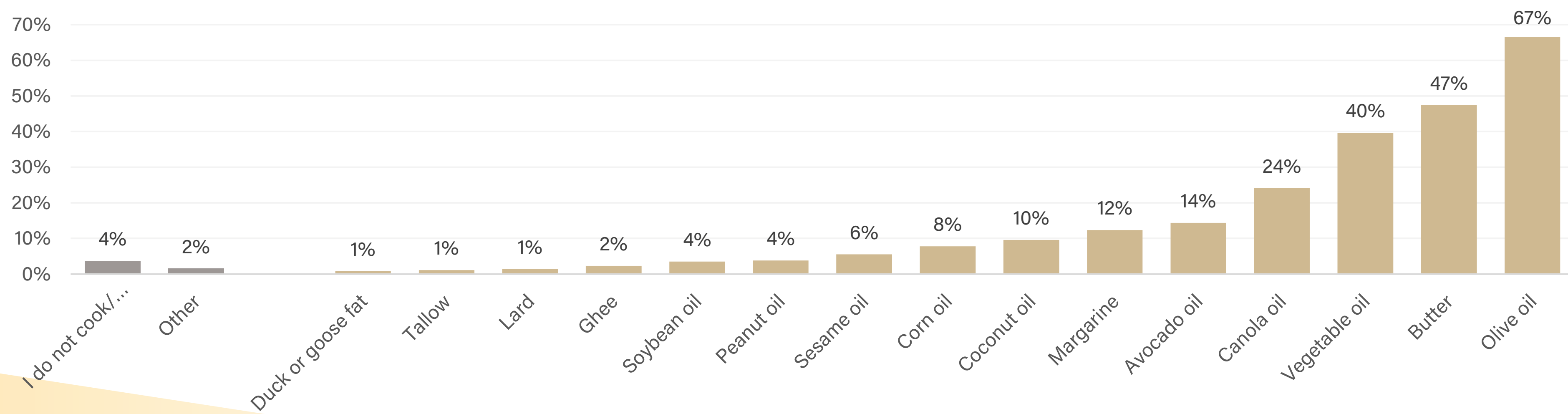


Figure 2. *"Which of the following do you use most often when cooking food? Please select up to three."*, Apr. 2025



PERCEPTIONS OF SEED OILS

Where have consumers heard about seed oils?

Seed oils have become a hot topic in the health and nutrition landscape, drawing varying support and opposition from media and health organizations.[34] Approximately 43% of respondents have heard the term "seed oils" in the past month (**Figure 4**). Of those 43% of consumers, the majority say they have encountered information or opinions about seed oils on social media (55%), followed by news (43%) and friends or family (34%). Fewer say they have encountered information about seed oils from healthcare professionals (17%), public health officials (13%) and scientific journals (13%) (**Figure 5**). This shows the powerful reach and influence popular social media channels can have in the food and nutrition space.

Figure 4. *"In the past 30 days, have you seen or heard the term 'seed oils'?"*, Apr. 2025

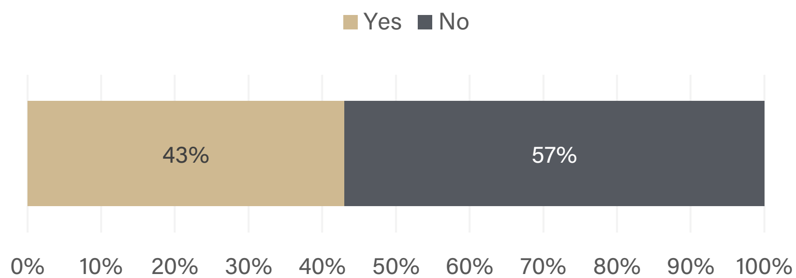
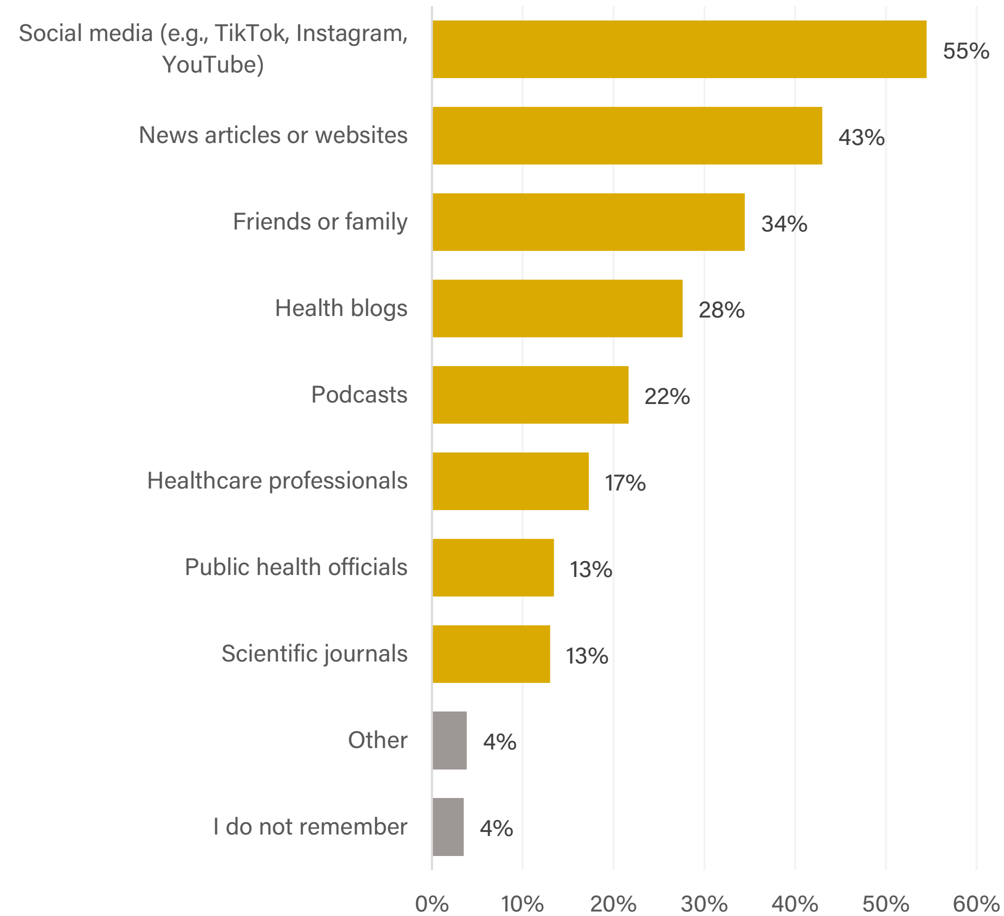


Figure 5. *" Where have you encountered information or opinions about seed oils? (Select all that apply)"*, Apr. 2025

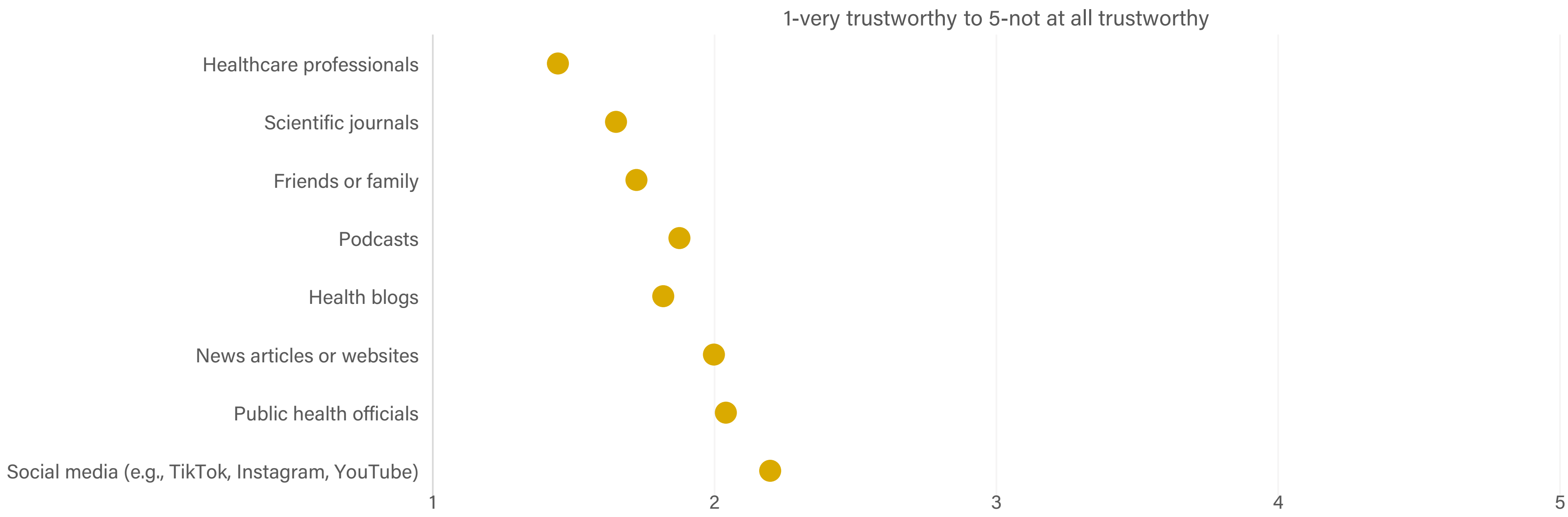


PERCEPTIONS OF SEED OILS

How do consumers perceive the information they see related to seed oils?

A follow-up was asked to gauge consumer trust in the sources indicated in the previous question from 1-very trustworthy to 5-not at all trustworthy (**Figure 6**). Generally, consumers are more trusting than untrusting of the information they come across regarding seed oils, with an overall average of 1.9 on the scale when aggregating all sources. However, consumers are slightly more trusting of the information they see or hear from healthcare professionals, scientific journals and family and friends than other sources, such as social media.

Figure 6. *"How trustworthy do you find the information about seed oils from...",* Apr. 2025



PERCEPTIONS OF SEED OILS

How often do consumers check their food contents for seed oils?

After gauging familiarity and perceptions, respondents were presented with a definition of seed oils and asked about their food purchasing habits.[5] Overall, consumers do not check ingredients lists for seed oils very frequently when grocery shopping. The frequency at which they do the same when eating food away from home is even lower, with 55% saying they "never" ask or check whether seed oils are used when eating out (**Figure 7**).

Figure 8 paints a similar picture. We see that avoidance of seed oils both in the grocery store and when eating out is relatively low. Similarly, when asked how likely they are to actively seek out restaurants or fast food places that cook with animal fats (e.g., tallow, lard, butter, ghee, etc.) instead of seed oils, 51% responded "unlikely" to some degree, with 25% saying they are "very unlikely" to do so. Only 21% say they are at least "somewhat likely" to choose establishments that use animal fats in their cooking processes in place of seed oils.

Figure 7. How often consumers check for seed oils in their food, Apr. 2025

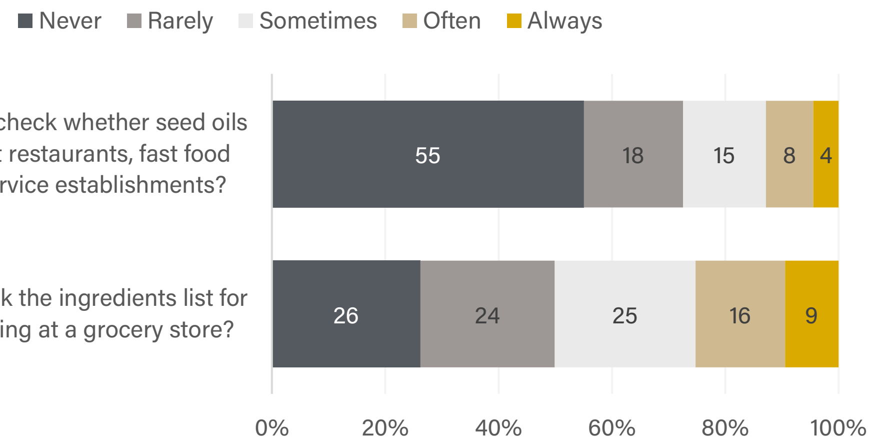
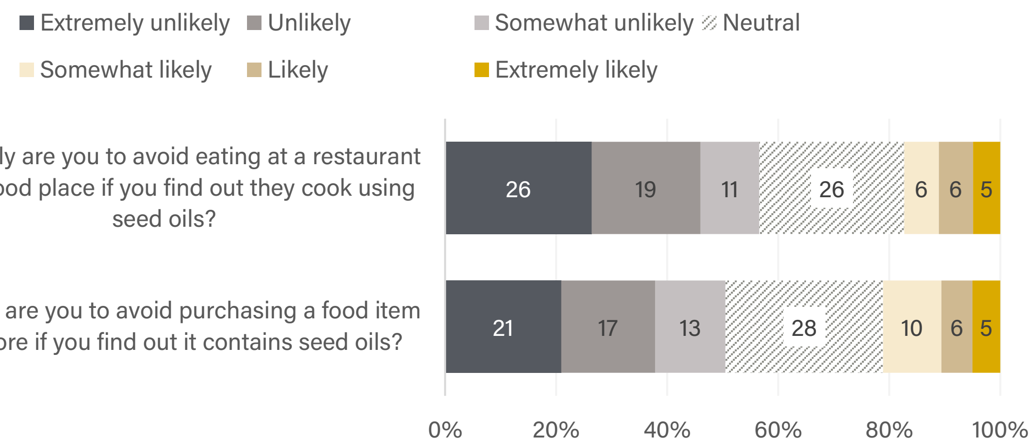


Figure 8. Consumer likelihood of avoiding foods with seed oils, Apr. 2025



PERCEPTIONS OF SEED OILS

Are consumers trying to avoid seed oils when cooking?

When it comes to their own cooking at home, 20% of consumers say they are currently trying to avoid using seed oils and 18% say they were trying to avoid using seed oils this time last year (**Figure 9**). As previously shown in Figure 2, many seed oils, such as canola and vegetable oil, are a staple in Americans' cooking. Those who are attempting to avoid such oils are more likely to substitute in animal fats and non-seed oils, such as olive or avocado oils, into their cooking. Health concerns were the most common reasons cited in the open response to why they are trying to avoid seed oils (**Figure 10**).

Respondents were then asked for their level of agreement with statements related to seed oils (**Figure 11**). Most consumers (53%) agree with the statement that seed oils are safe to consume, and nearly half believe they are healthier than animal fats. However, consumers find food cooked with the latter tastier. Additional analysis revealed little difference in overall perceptions of seed oils based on where the respondent saw information about seed oils. Of note, the response distributions for many of the statements indicate that a sizable share of consumers are unsure about or take a neutral stance to the claims. This reveals a need for clear communication of robust research to better inform the general public about important health info on seed oils, especially given their recent presence in the media spotlight.

Figure 9. Current and past avoidance of seed oils when cooking, Apr. 2025

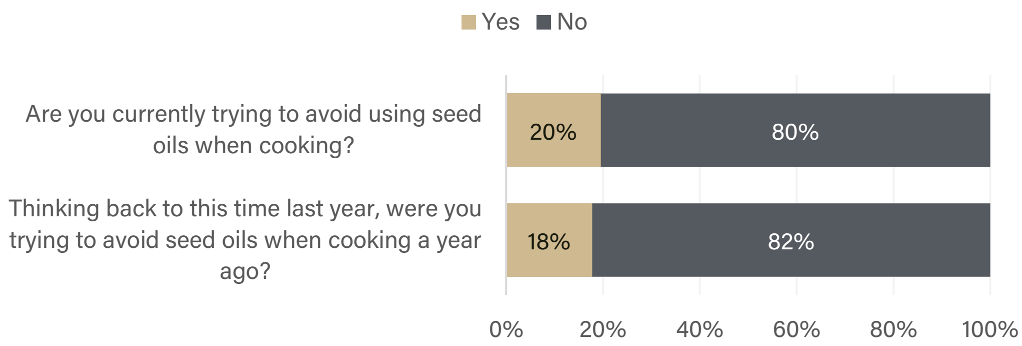
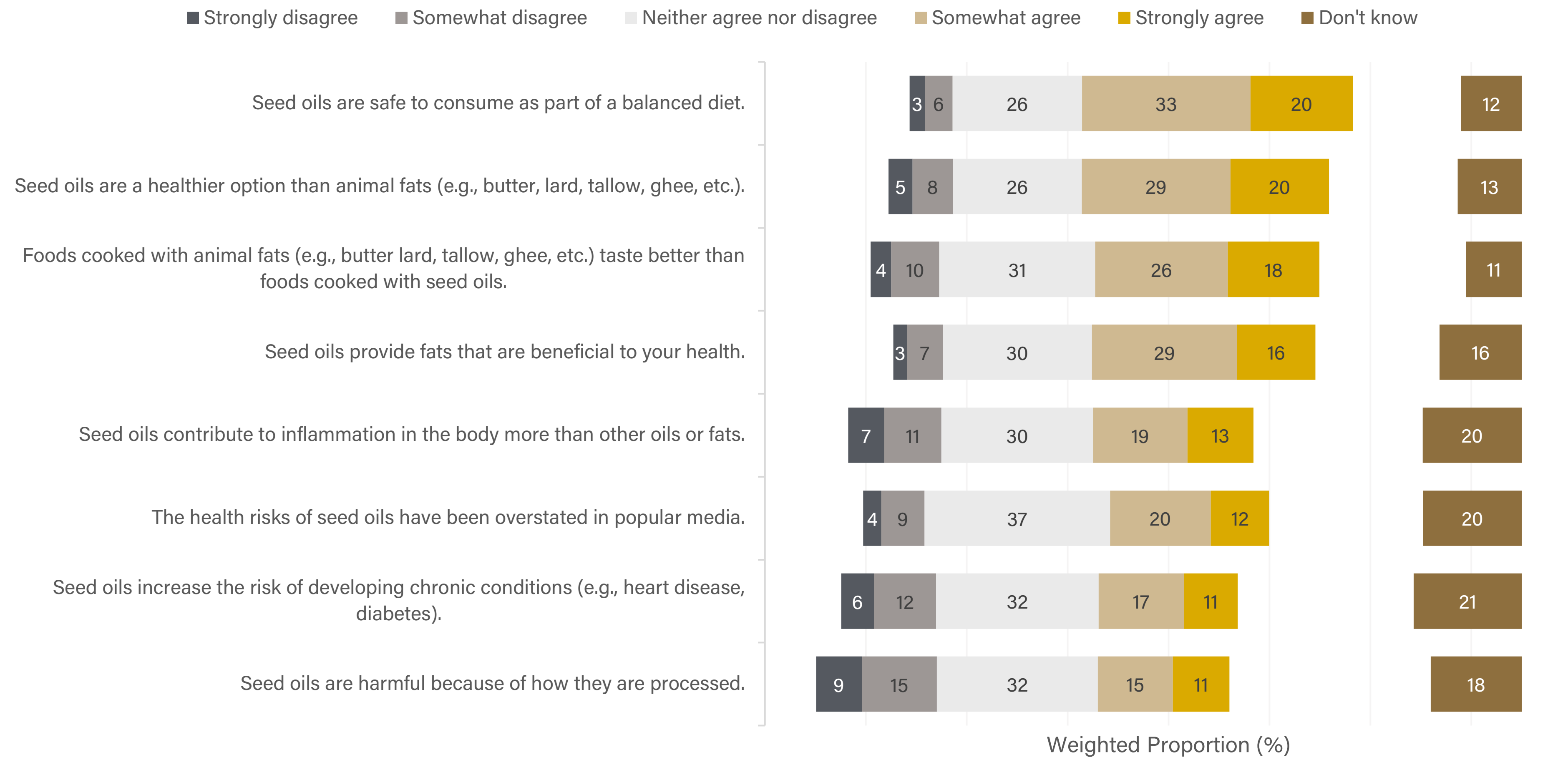


Figure 10. Why people are limiting seed oils: open-response wordcloud, Apr. 2025

PERCEPTIONS OF SEED OILS

Figure 11. *"Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements regarding seed oils. Please read each statement carefully."*, Apr. 2025



FOOD SATISFACTION

Are Americans satisfied with their diets?

Respondents score their own diet on a 0-10 scale, with the top of that scale (10) representing their ideal diet.[6] Scores are categorized as thriving (7-10), struggling (5-6) or suffering (0-4). Two-thirds of consumers score their diet as a 7-10 on this scale (thriving), 21% score their diet as 5-6 (struggling) and 12% score their diet 0-4 (suffering) (**Figure 12**). Diet well-being has remained steady since the inception of the CFI, and the majority of consumers (85%) report being happy with their diets (**Figure 13**).

Figure 14 breaks down diet well-being by region. The 12-month comparison reflects the same stability we see in aggregated diet well-being. However, we do see some differences by region. In particular, consumers in the West and Northeast regions rank their diets slightly higher on the diet well-being ladder than those in the Midwest and South, on average. A little over 70% of these consumers are considered "thriving" based on their ratings. While these differences between regions are statistically significant, the majority of consumers from all regions rate their diet 7-10 on the 0-10 scale, showing the ability of the U.S. food system to continue to satisfy a variety of diets.

Figure 12. Diet well-being index, Jan. 2022 - Apr. 2025

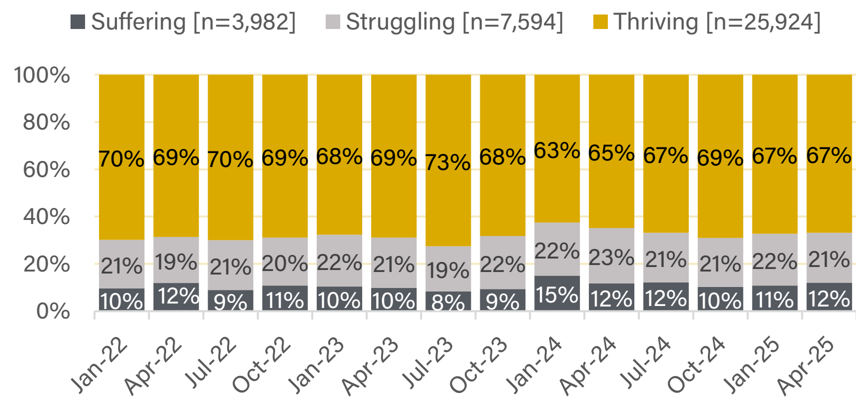
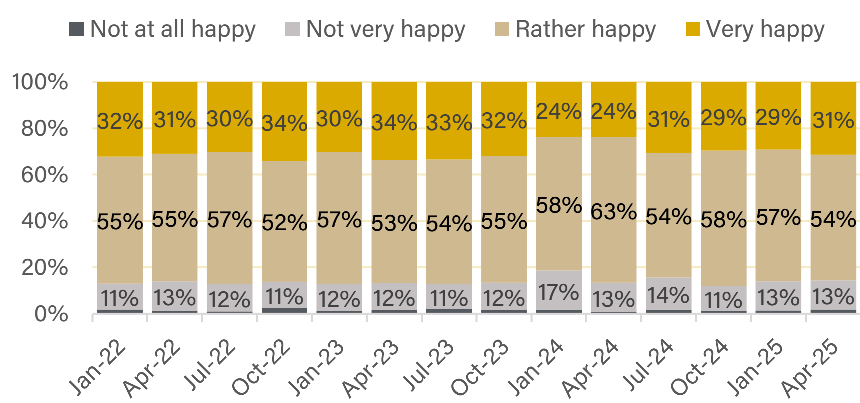
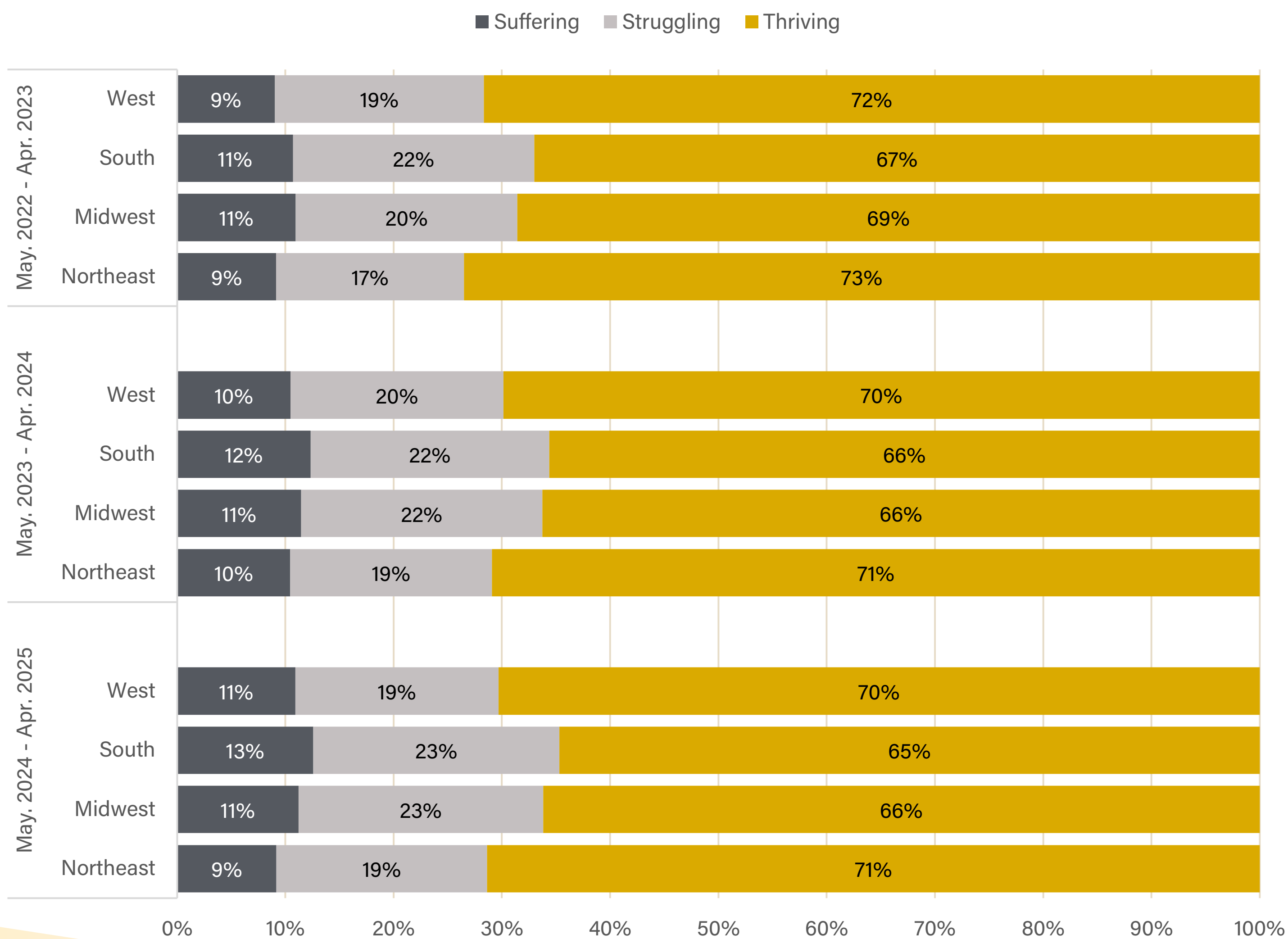


Figure 13. Rate of consumer diet happiness, Jan. 2022 - Apr. 2025



FOOD SATISFACTION

Figure 14. Diet well-being index by region, Jan. 2022 - Apr. 2025



DIET QUALITY

What is the quality of the American adult diet?

Utilizing a 9-item questionnaire known as the Mini-EAT Tool[7], we estimate consumers' reported diet quality in the last 30 days.

Figure 15 summarizes Mini-EAT scores since February 2024. Diets are classified as unhealthy (<61), intermediate (61-69) and healthy (69<). American adults score an average of 62 on this scale, which puts them in the intermediate classification, just above the unhealthy threshold. The overall average has remained steady over the past 12 months.

Consistent with the literature on regional diet quality, consumers in the West region of the U.S. exhibit the highest average Mini-EAT scores (63.3). Consumers in the South region report the lowest average diet quality score among adults at 61.9. While subtle differences exist between regions, the overall message is the same: American adults need to make substantial improvements to the foods they eat. Despite higher scores in the West compared to other regions, the average diet quality scores across all regions still hover just above what is considered unhealthy (**Figure 16**).

Figure 15. Weighted average Mini-EAT diet quality score, Feb. 2024 - Apr. 2025

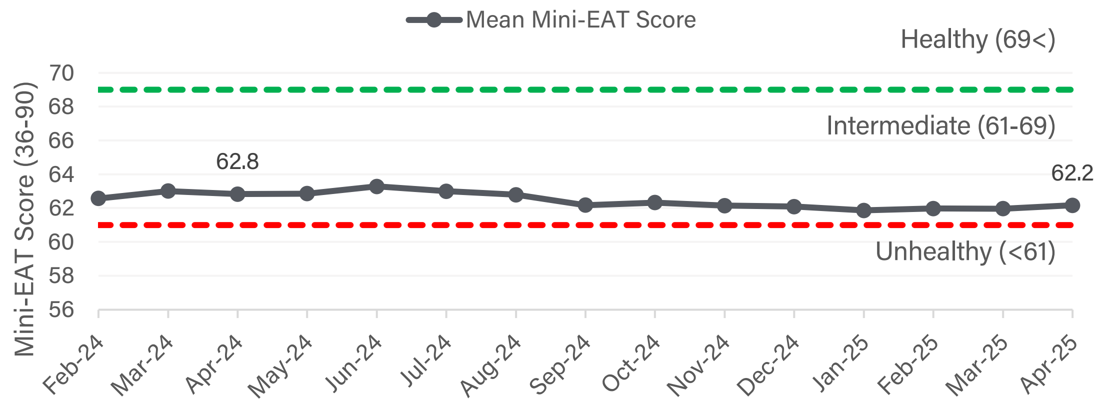
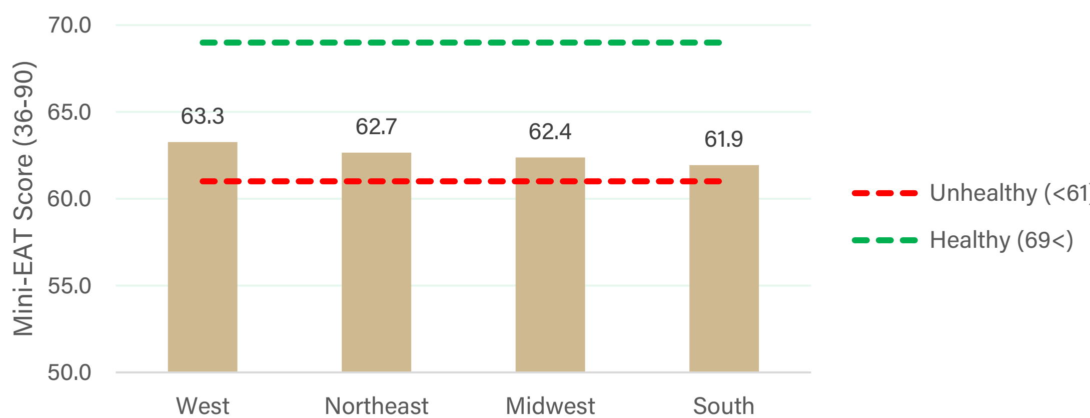


Figure 16. Weighted average Mini-EAT diet quality score by region, Feb. 2024 - Mar. 2025



FOOD EXPENDITURES

How much are American households spending on food?

Each month, consumers report their household's weekly spending on food from the last 30 days (**Figure 17**). On average, consumers reported spending about $123/week on groceries (food at home - FAH) and $71/week on restaurants and other carryout (food away from home - FAFH) this month.[8]

Consumer estimates of food inflation over the past year rose to 5%. Similarly, consumer expectations for future food inflation jumped from 2.9% in March to 3.8% this month (**Figure 18**). After a decline in the food inflation rate from late 2022 to late 2024, we are beginning to see a slight increase in the CPI food inflation rate. Consumers may be keying in on this change and adjusting their expectations accordingly. Other reports show worsening consumer expectations for inflation and the economy in recent months.[9] Similarly, consumers' expectations about the economy are likely driving their expectations about the future of food prices.

Figure 17. Weekly household food expenditures, Jan. 2022 - Apr. 2025

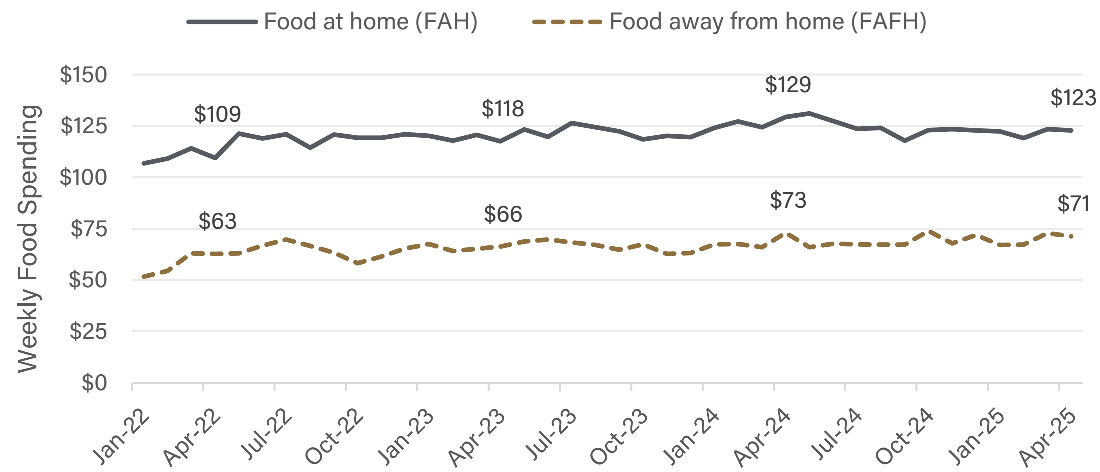
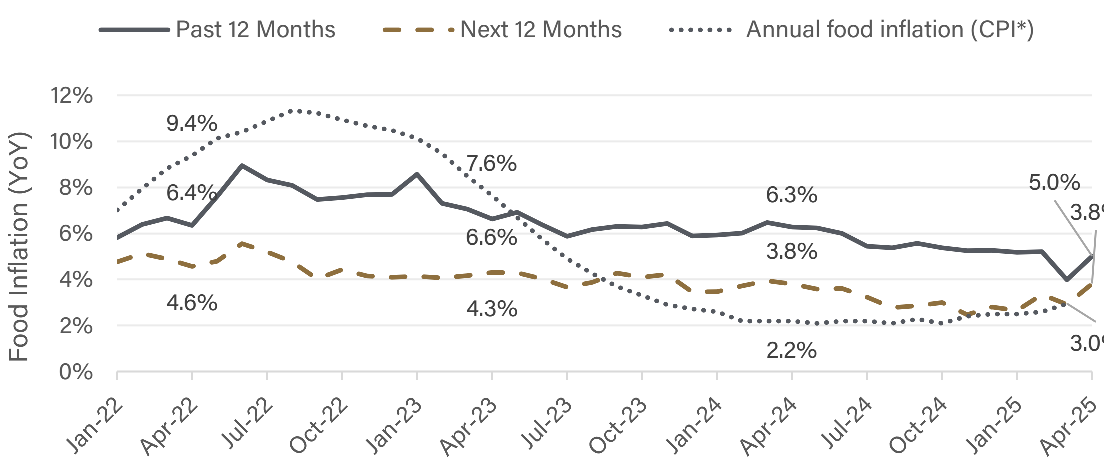


Figure 18. Consumer estimates of food inflation compared to gov. estimate, Jan. 2022 - Apr. 2025



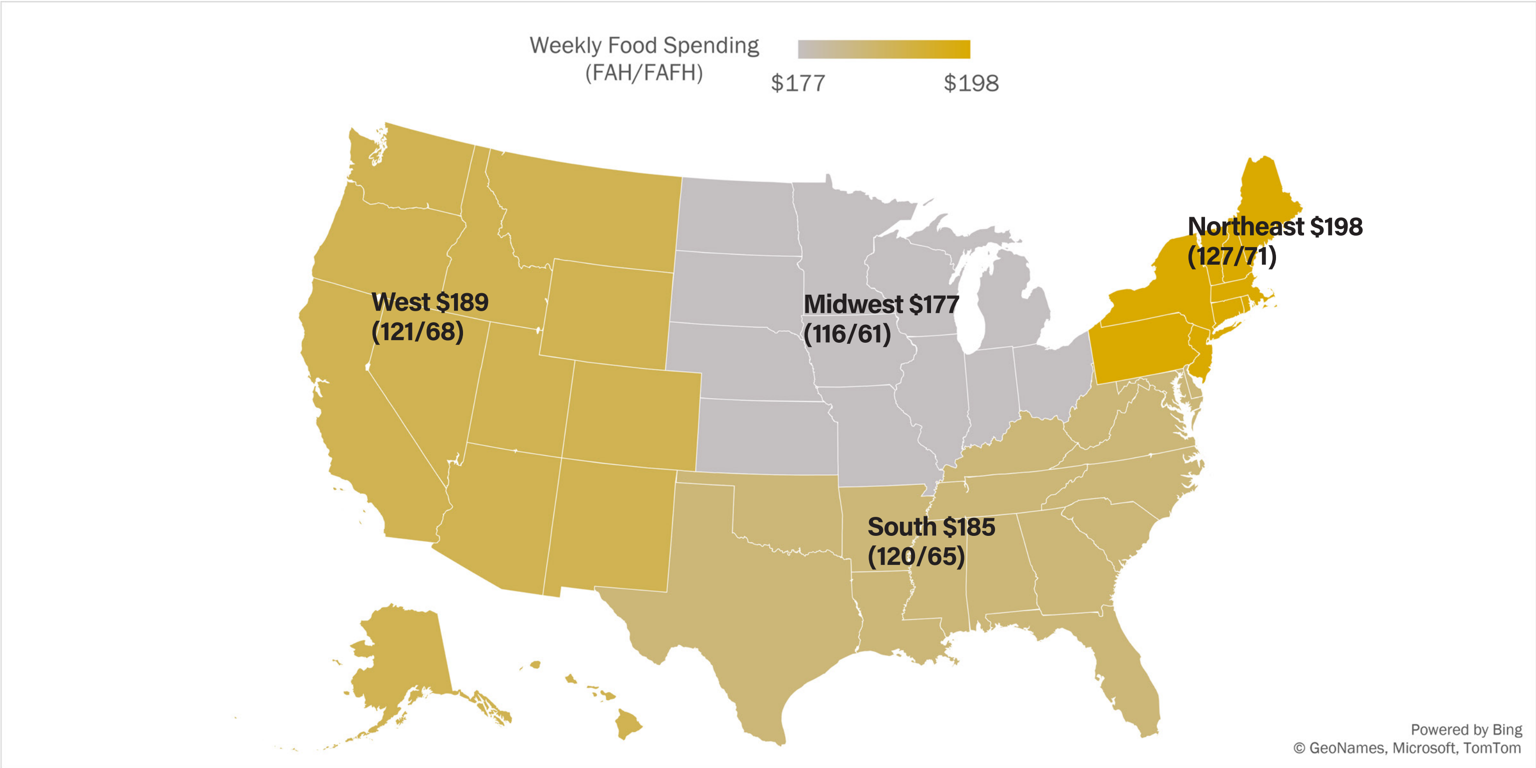
*The Consumer Price Index (CPI) is a measure of inflation computed by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

FOOD EXPENDITURES

How does food spending differ by region?

Average weekly food expenditures are highest in the West and Northeast regions of the U.S. compared to the South and Midwest. This is not entirely surprising to see, given the general high cost of living in many of the coastal cities and states within the West and Northeast regions (**Figure 19**).

Figure 19. Consumer estimates of food inflation compared to gov. estimate, Jan. 2022 - Apr. 2025



FOOD SECURITY

Which Americans are having trouble buying food for their families?

Based on a set of six standard questions about food purchased and eaten in the past 30 days, we estimate national food insecurity to be 12.8% in April. After a slight increase over the past few months, we have observed food insecurity returning closer to its historical average (**Figure 20**).[10]

Combining all months of CFI reveals regional differences in household food insecurity rates. Food insecurity in the U.S. is most prevalent among households in the South (16.7%) followed by households in the Midwest (13.8%) (**Figure 21**). Households in the Northeast and West have lower rates of food insecurity at 11.9% and 11.7% respectively. These results are consistent with other national data from the USDA.[11] Nearly half of the states in the South census region have poverty rates exceeding 15%, highlighting the stark economic disparities that contribute to the region's elevated food insecurity compared to other parts of the country.[12]

Figure 20. Rate of household food insecurity in the last 30 days, Jan. 2022 - Apr. 2025

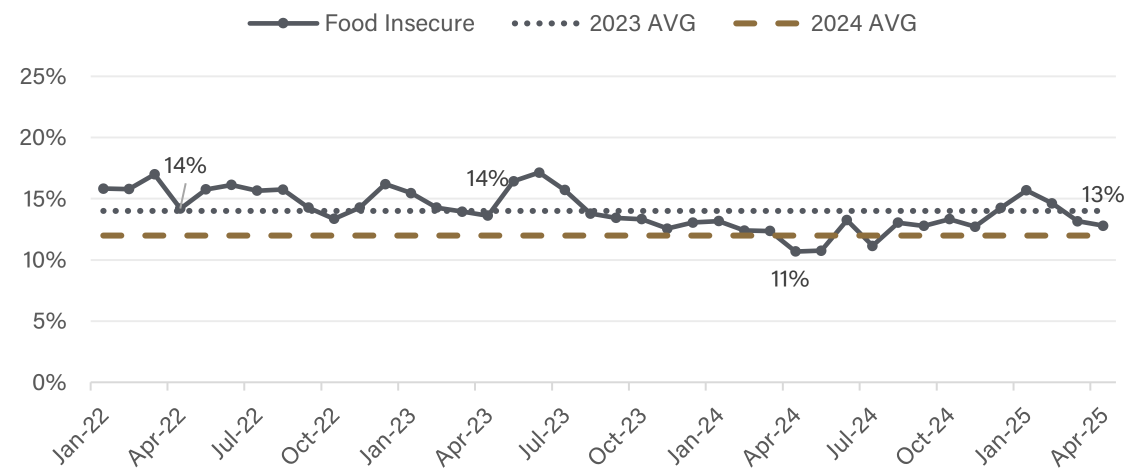
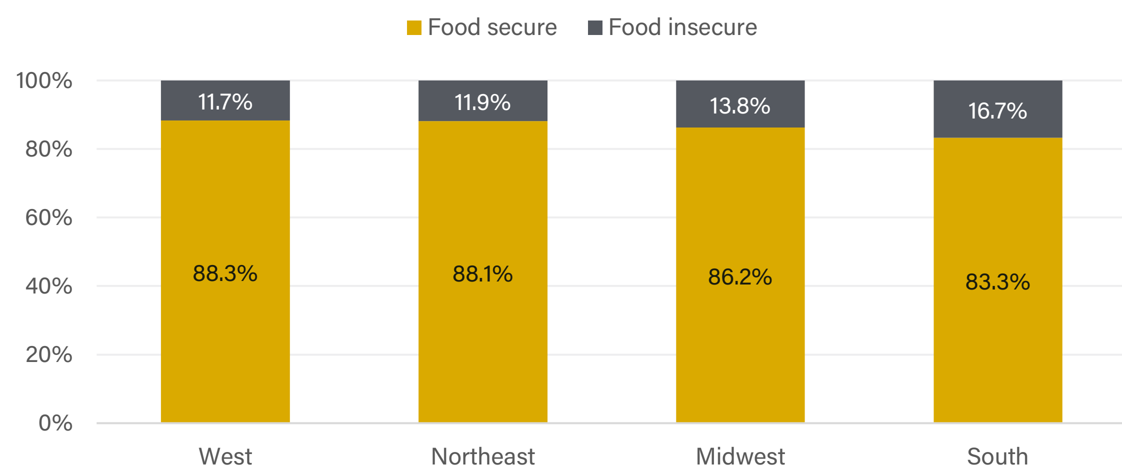


Figure 21. Rate of household food insecurity in the last 30 days by region, Jan. 2022 - Apr. 2025



CONSUMER BEHAVIORS

How are Americans navigating their food environment?

Consumers are asked to report the frequency at which they chose certain foods, checked labels and performed at-home food behaviors (**Figure 22**). Overall, we observe only subtle differences between U.S. regions. Notably, consumers in the Midwest region report choosing non-conventional foods less frequently when shopping compared to those living in the Northeast and West.

We observe many similarities between regions with it comes to label checking and at-home food behaviors, though Midwestern consumers tend to check labels for things like food origin, recalls, GMOs and production slightly less than others.

Figure 22. Frequency of consumer shopping and eating habits by region , Jan. 2022 - Apr. 2025

	Northeast	Midwest	South	West
Chose generic foods over brand-name foods	3.2	3.3	3.3	3.3
Chose local foods over non-local foods	3.2	3.0	3.0	3.1
Chose wild-caught fish over farm-raised fish	3.0	2.8	2.9	3.1
Chose grass-fed beef over conventional beef	3.0	2.7	2.8	3.0
Chose cage-free eggs over conventional eggs	3.0	2.6	2.8	3.1
Chose organic foods over non-organic foods	2.8	2.5	2.7	2.8
Chose plant-based proteins over animal proteins	2.5	2.2	2.4	2.4
Checked the use-by/sell-by date at the store	4.1	4.0	4.0	4.1
Checked the nutrition label before buying new foods	3.5	3.3	3.4	3.5
Checked for natural or clean labels	3.1	2.8	3.0	3.0
Checked where my food originated	3.0	2.7	2.9	2.9
Checked for food recalls	3.0	2.7	2.9	2.8
Checked for GMO ingredients	2.9	2.6	2.8	2.8
Checked how my food was produced	2.9	2.6	2.8	2.8
Took steps to reduce food waste at home	3.8	3.8	3.7	3.8
Recycled food packaging	3.8	3.5	3.3	3.7
Threw away food past the use-by date	3.3	3.1	3.3	3.2
Composted food scraps	2.4	2.2	2.3	2.6
Ate fruits and vegetables without washing them	2.3	2.2	2.2	2.2
Ate rare or undercooked meat	2.0	1.9	1.9	1.9
Ate raw dough or batter	2.0	1.9	1.9	1.9

Mean Score	
5	Always
4	Often
3	Sometimes
2	Rarely
1	Never

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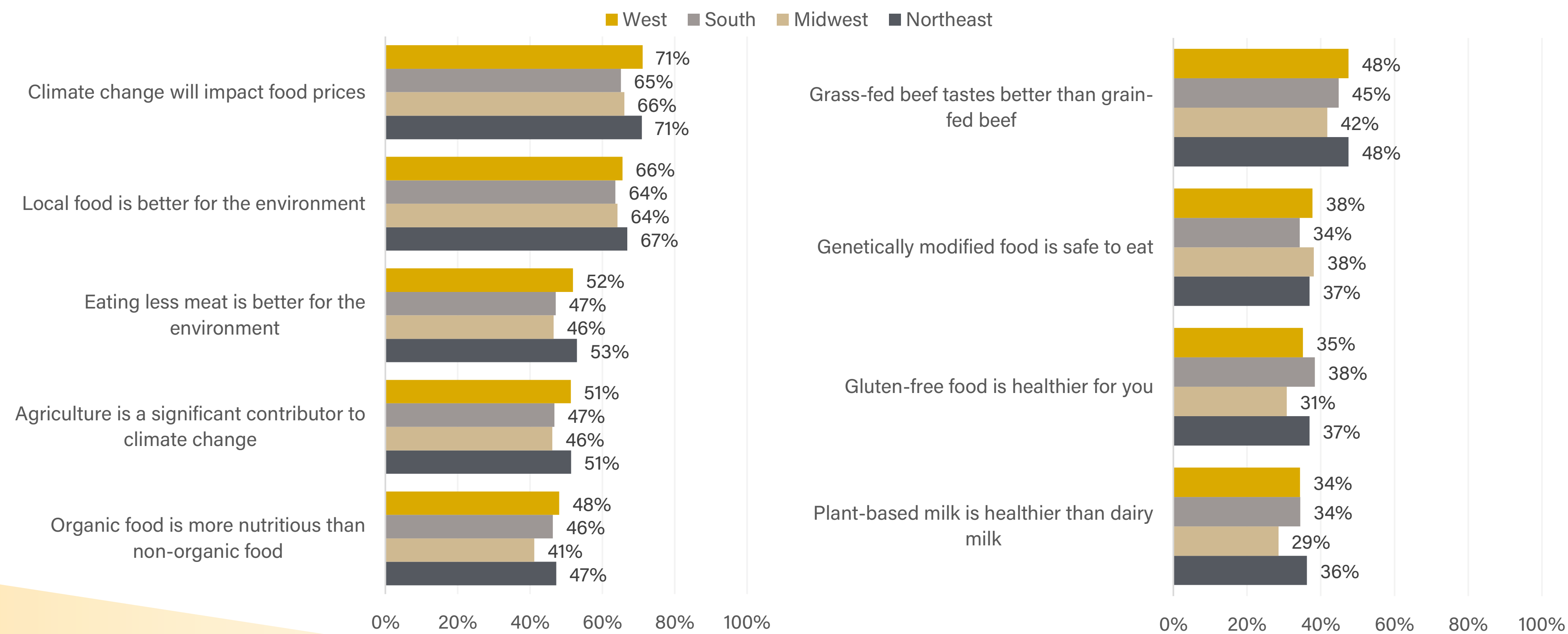
Questions? Contact ehbryant@purdue.edu

CONSUMER BELIEFS

What do Americans believe about their food and food system?

Figure 23 summarizes consumer agreement with various statements pertaining to our food system. Consumer agreement with statements about the connection between food and the environment is shared among consumers from all regions, though a slightly larger share of those in the Northeast and West region generally agree with these statements. Agreement about the healthfulness of plant-based milk, genetically modified foods and gluten-free foods is lower. Respondents in the Midwest—home to many agriculturally productive states—were less likely to agree with statements about the health and safety of alternative agricultural products compared to conventional ones.

Figure 23. Share of consumers who "somewhat agree" or "strongly agree" with claims about food by region, Mar. 2022 - Apr. 2025



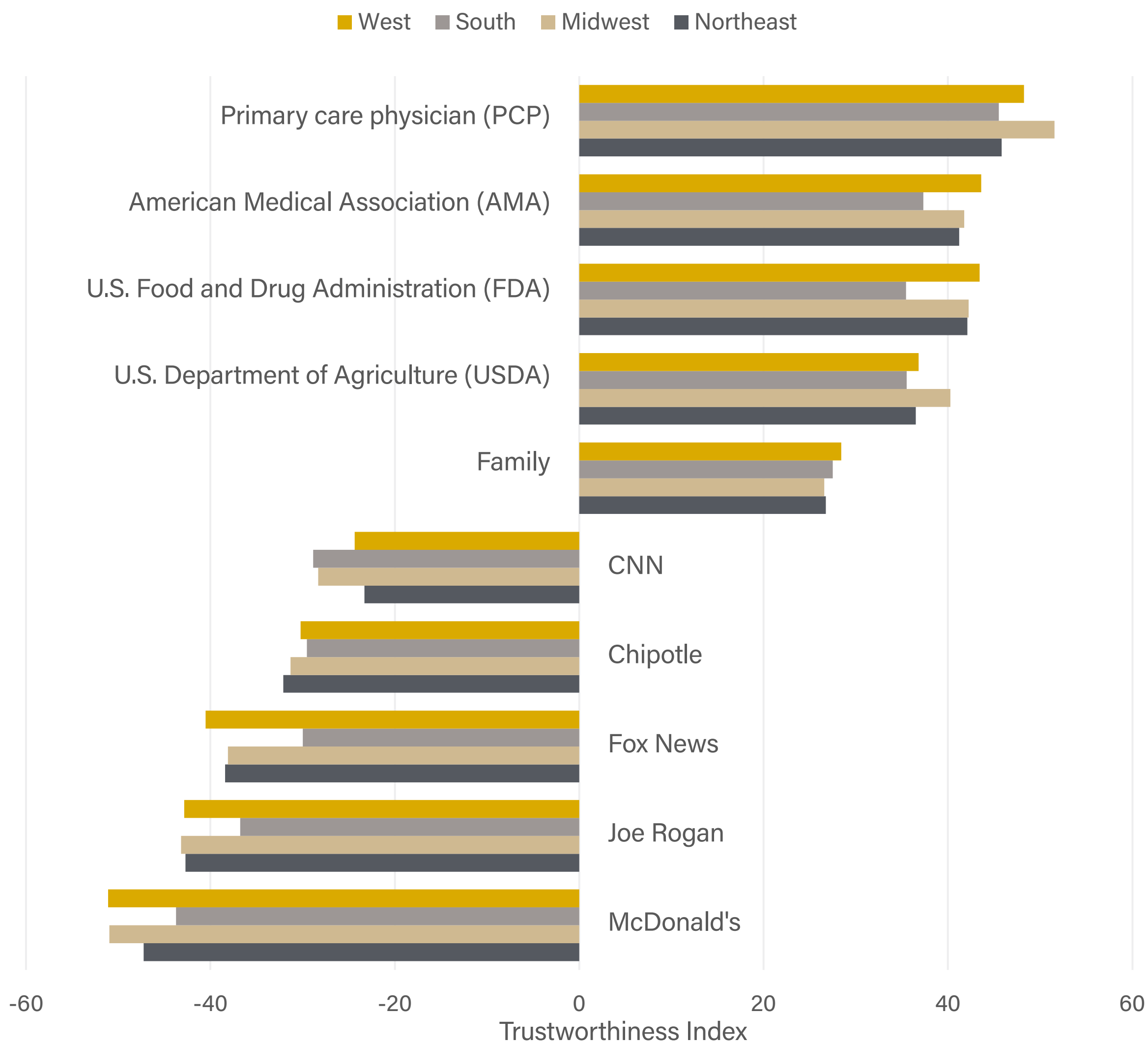
CONSUMER TRUST

Who do Americans trust on topics of food?

Respondents select their most-trusted and least-trusted sources of information about healthy and sustainable food from a list that includes a variety of information sources, such as news networks, government agencies, food companies, personal networks and higher education institutions. Responses are scored and converted to a Trust Index from -100 (least trusted) to 100 (most trusted).[13]

Figure 24 summarizes the top 5 most and least trusted sources as selected from a list of 20 options broken down by region. When asked to identify their most trusted sources from a fixed list, respondents were more likely to select primary care physicians and public organizations focused on the U.S. food system than fast food companies or news media outlets. We observe few differences between regions. In general, consumers continue to prefer organizations and professionals that specialize in nutrition and food for information.

Figure 24. Trust index of food-related information sources by region, Jan. 2022 - Apr. 2025



ENDNOTES

1 Data were collected from an online opt-in panel maintained by the company Dynata over a 5-day period from April 21-25, 2025. The eligible population included U.S. adults ages 18+. A weighting method called iterative proportional fitting (or raking) was applied to ensure a demographically balanced sample by age, sex, race, census region, income, and SNAP participation. Population proportions reflect the most recent complete year of ACS census data (2023). Every respondent from the previous month was recontacted and asked to take the survey again. Not all respondents retake the survey, so the sample is filled with a new pool of respondents each month. Data collection for every survey begins on the third Monday of each month, unless otherwise dictated by holidays or extenuating circumstances. This report is released on the second Wednesday of the following month.

2 Sample size Jan. 2022 - Apr. 2025: Northeast (n=9,705); Midwest (n=10,439); South (n=19,339); West (n=10,185)
Sample size Apr. 2025: Northeast (n=235); Midwest (n=253); South (n=460); West (n=279)

3 Cleveland Clinic (2025). Seed Oils: Are They Actually Toxic?. Cleveland Clinic Health Essentials. Retrieved from https://health.clevelandclinic.org/seed-oils-are-they-actually-toxic

4 Broderick, M. (2025). Confused about seed oils? Everything you need to know from health benefits to cooking options. UCHealth Today. Retrieved from http://uchealth.org/today/everything-you-need-to-know-about-seed-oils/

5 The definition of seed oils presented to respondents: "*Seed oils are oils extracted from plant seeds and are commonly used in cooking, baking, and food processing. Common seed oils include canola, corn, sunflower, sesame, safflower, grapeseed, cottonseed, and soybean oil. Oils labeled "vegetable oil" commonly found in the store usually contain seed oils.*"

6 This scale is based on the Cantril Scale used in Gallup's World Poll to assess well-being and happiness around the world. Thus, we use the same validated conceptual labels—thriving, struggling, and suffering—to group responses.

ENDNOTES

7 Lara-Breitinger KM et al. Validation of a Brief Dietary Questionnaire for Use in Clinical Practice: Mini-EAT (Eating Assessment Tool). J Am Heart Assoc. 2023 Jan 3;12(1):e025064. doi: 10.1161/JAHA.121.025064. Epub 2022 Dec 30. PMID: 36583423; PMCID: PMC9973598.

8 Food at home (FAH) refers to food sales meant for home or off-site consumption and the value of donations and non-market acquisitions, which is acquired from outlets such as grocery stores, convenience stores, direct sales, etc. Food away from home (FAFH) refers to food sales meant for immediate consumption, federal food programs, and food furnished as an ancillary activity, which is acquired from outlets such as restaurants, bars, schools, etc.

9 University of Michigan, Survey Research Center, Survey of Consumers (2025). March 2025 Update: Current versus Pre-Pandemic Long-Run Inflation Expectations. Retrieved from https://data.sca.isr.umich.edu/

10 High or marginal food security (i.e., food secure): 0-1 reported indications of food-access problems; little indication of change in diet or food intake. Respondents who reported an income above 185% of the federal poverty line were also screened as having high food security. This determination was made according to research by Ahn et al. (2020), which shows that using a modified income-based screening procedure for internet surveys better approximates government estimates of food insecurity. Low food security (i.e., food insecure): 2-4 reported indications of reduced quality, variety, or desirability of diet; little indication of reduced food intake. Very low food security (i.e., food insecure): 5-6 reported indications of disrupted eating patterns, changes in diet, and reduced food intake.

11 USDA ERS (2025). Food Security in the U.S. - Key Statistics & Graphics. Retrieved from https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/key-statistics-graphics

12 U.S. Census Bureau. (2024). Poverty in states and metropolitan areas: 2023. U.S. Department of Commerce. Retrieved from https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/2024/demo/acsbr-022.pdf

13 Trust questions were not fielded in the Consumer Food Insights survey from October 2022 - December 2022.