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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.

This edition of the CFI survey disaggregates key findings by whether or not consumers are retired (retiree) or not retireed (non-retiree). 31% of the population for this survey self-designated as retirees. New questions explore consumers' preferences for online grocery shopping capabilities.

KEY INSIGHTS FROM NOVEMBER

- Food values remain stable with taste, affordability and nutrition being most important to consumers.
- The food security rate was 13% in February, down 2-percentage points since January.
- Near 60% of respondents list nutritional targets and health goals as important when shopping online for groceries.
- Food at Home (FAH) inflation was nearly 2.1% over the last 12 months, although consumers perceive food inflation over 2-percentage points higher.
- Average food insecurity rate for non-retirees (14%) is 4 percentage points higher than retirees (10%).

CPI FOOD INFLATION	FOOD INSECURITY	FOOD SPENDING	GROCERY STOCKOUTS
-2*	-2	+/-0	+1
2.9%	13%	$201/WEEK	11%

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

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ONLINE SHOPPING

What factors are important when shopping for groceries online?

This month we asked respondents about their preferences when it comes to online grocery shopping and ways they think the online shopping experience could be enhanced. When asked which factors consumers consider important when shopping for groceries, nutritional targets and health goals were selected by 59% and 57%, respectively, **Figure 1**. Only 37% of respondents selected taste preferences as the most important thing they consider when shopping for groceries online, which is interesting because consistently we see taste as the key motivator behind consumers' food purchasing decisions (see Food Values). When consumers were asked what they would prioritize in a personalize online shopping environment, 26% indicated they would would prioritize personalization related to budgets and prices, **Figure 2**.

Figure 1. "Which of the following factors do you consider important when shopping for groceries? Select all that apply." Feb. 2026

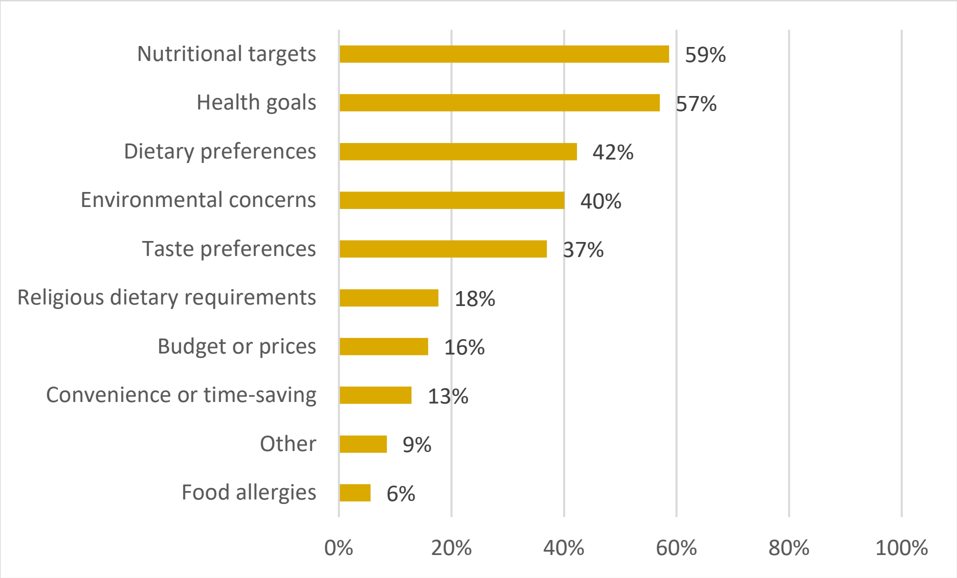
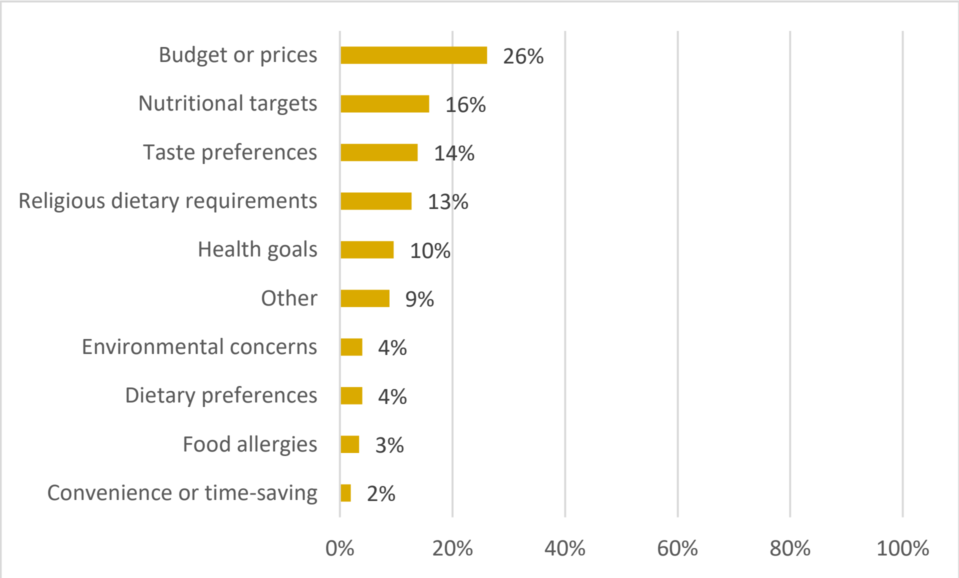


Figure 2. "If your online grocery shopping experience could be personalized, which factor would you **prioritize** for personalization?" Feb. 2026



ONLINE SHOPPING

Would you like a personalized online shopping experience?

We then asked consumers about their willingness to share personal information and data in order to help personalize an online shopping experience. 58% of respondents indicated they were somewhat or strongly willing to share information, like dietary preferences or health goals for a personalized experience, whereas 20% were strongly or somewhat unwilling, **Figure 3**. When asked how comfortable consumers were with online grocery retailers using their existing personal data to personalize their shopping experience nearly 51% of respondents were willing and 30% were unwilling, **Figure 4.**

Figure 3. "How willing are you to share information, like dietary preferences or health goals, for a more personalized shopping experience?" Feb. 2026.

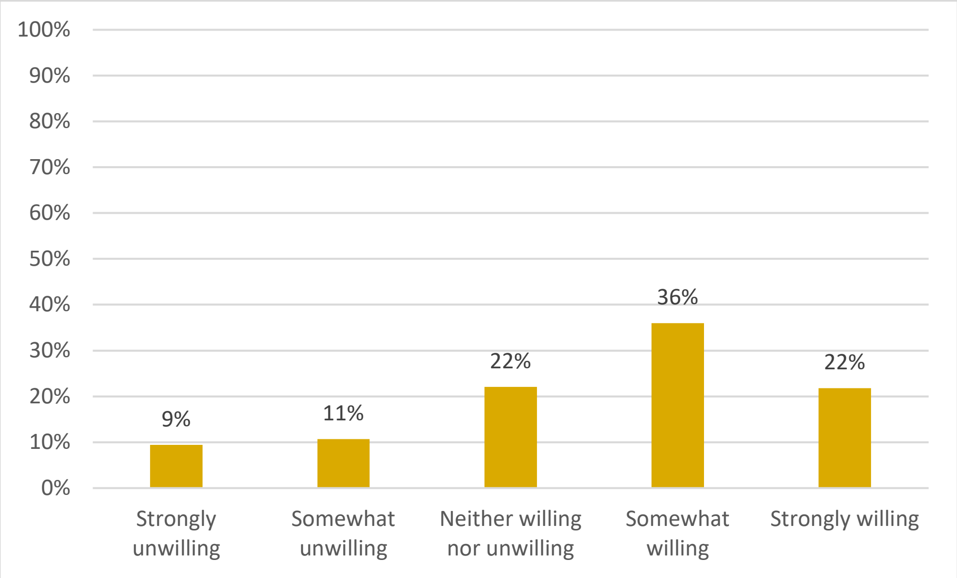
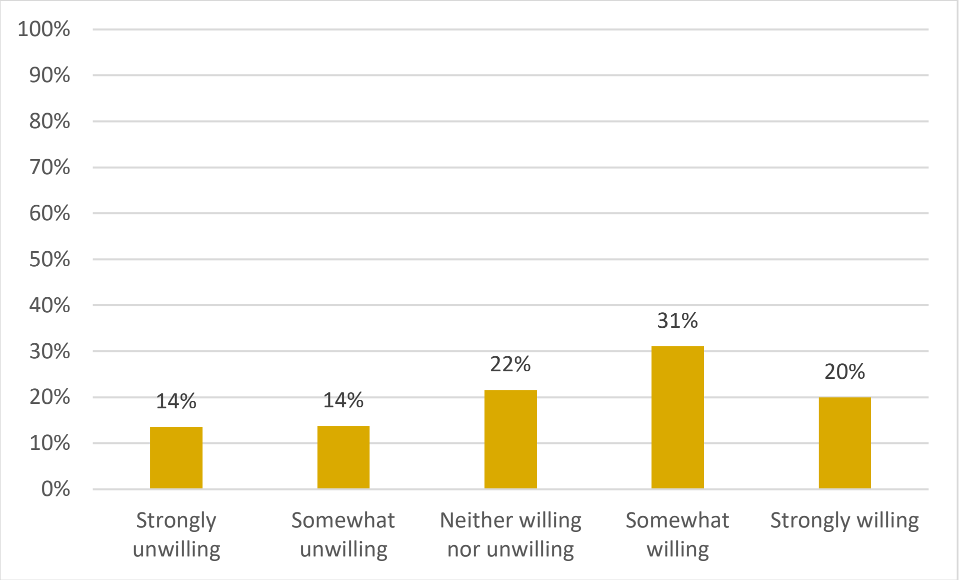


Figure 4. "How comfortable are you with an online grocery retailer using your existing personal data (e.g., past purchases, browsing history) to personalize your shopping experience?" Feb. 2026



FOOD VALUES

What attributes do consumers value most when purchasing food?

Respondents were asked to allocate 100 points to six food attributes based on their importance when grocery shopping.[2] This provides insight into the key motivators behind consumers' food purchasing decisions. **Figure 4** shows taste as the top food value, on average, followed by affordability and nutrition. These Food Value rankings have remained remarkably stable over the history of the Consumer Food Insights survey.

When comparing Food Values between retiree and non-retiree, not many differences can be seen between the way the share of apoints are allocated among the two groups, **Figure 5.**

Figure 4. Share of 100 points allocated to food attributes, Feb. 2026

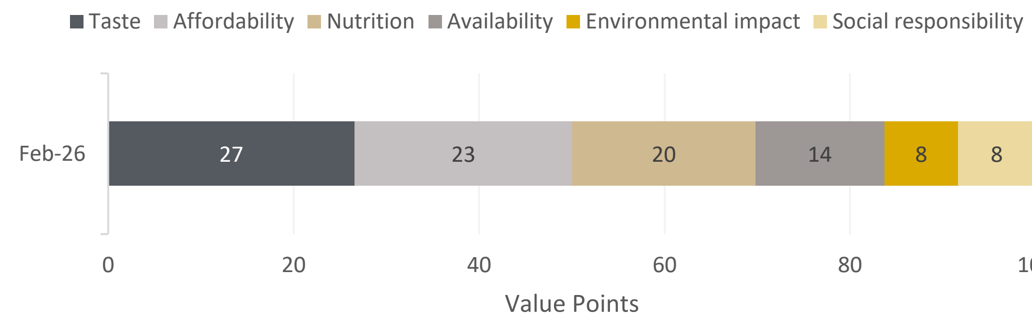
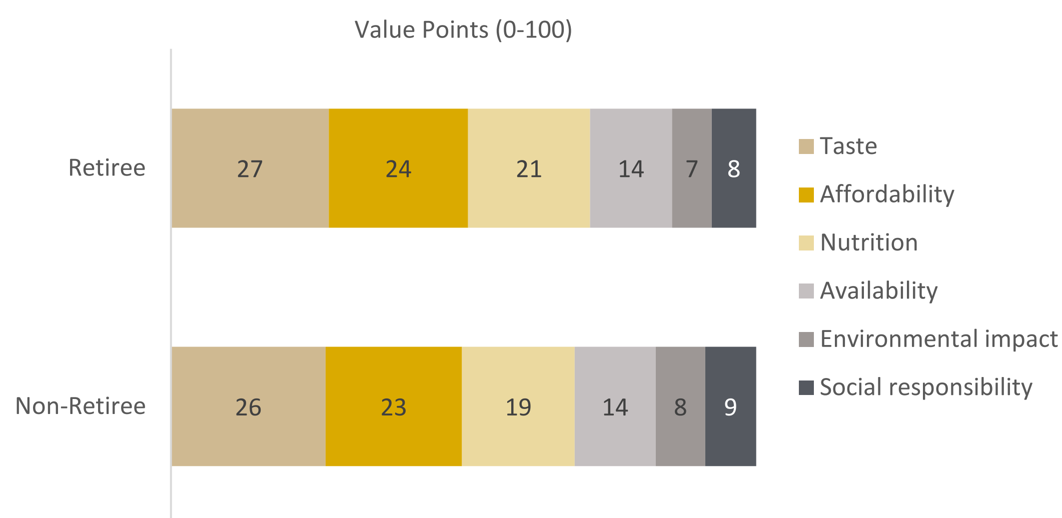


Figure 5. Share of 100 points allocated to food attributes by retiree classification, Feb. 2026



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 13.0% in February (**Figure 6**).[3] This represents a 2-percentage point decrease from last month and February 2025.

Figure 7 dives further into the data by showing the average annual food insecurity rate among retirees. Non-retirees (14%) have a higher food insecurity rate than retirees (10%).

Figure 6. Rate of household food insecurity in the last 30 days, Jan. 2022 - Feb. 2026

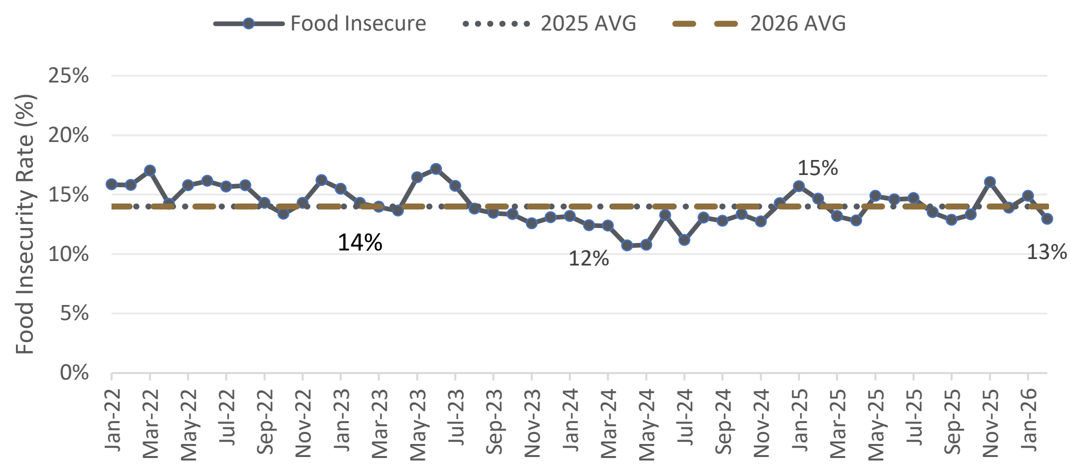


Figure 7. Rate of household food insecurity in the last 30 days by retiree and nonretiree households, Feb. 2026

DIET QUALITY

What is the quality of the American adult diet?

Utilizing a nine-item questionnaire known as the Mini-EAT Tool[4], we estimate consumers' self-reported diet quality in the last 30 days.

Figure 8 summarizes average Mini-EAT scores since February 2024, now two complete years of data. Diets are classified as unhealthy (<61), intermediate (61-69) and healthy (69<). Average diet quality in February was 62.0. This average is unchanged from last month. In February, 16%, 38% and 46% are classified as "healthy", "intermediate", and "unhealthy", respectively.

Average diet quality score among consumers who are retirees compared to non-retirees is comparable, **Figure 9.**

Figure 8. Purdue's American Diet Quality Index (PADQI), Feb. 2024 - Feb. 2026

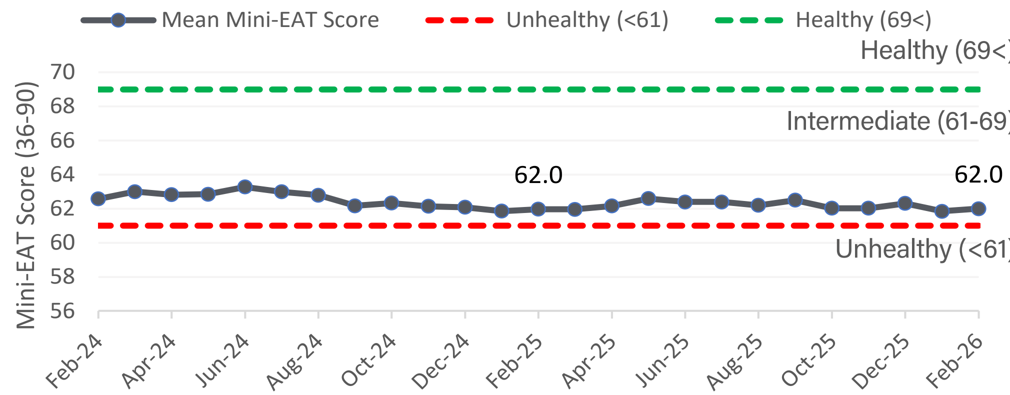
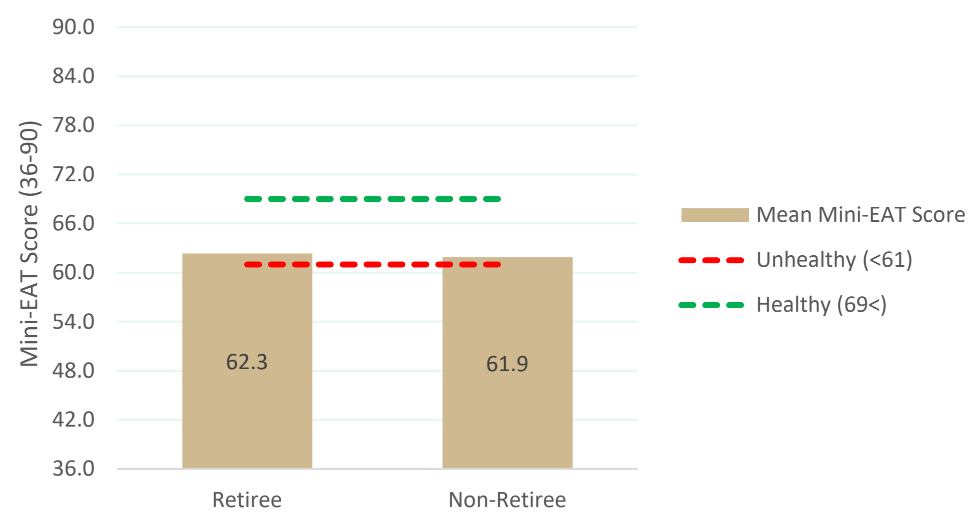


Figure 9. Mini-EAT diet quality classification by retiree classification, Feb. 2026



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 10**). On average, consumers reported spending about $128/week on groceries (food at home — FAH) and $73/week on restaurants and other carryout (food away from home — FAFH) in February.[5]

Consumer estimates of past grocery prices increased slightly and consumers expectations for future grocery prices decreased slightly from January to February (**Figure 11**).[6] The official CPI estimate of year-over-year food inflation decreased slightly (2.9), down 0.2 percentage points from last month. Consumers' perception of food inflation is over two times the CPI, suggesting a continued consistent perception gap between consumer sentiment regarding food prices and official estimates.

Figure 10. Weekly household food expenditures, Jan. 2022 - Feb. 2026

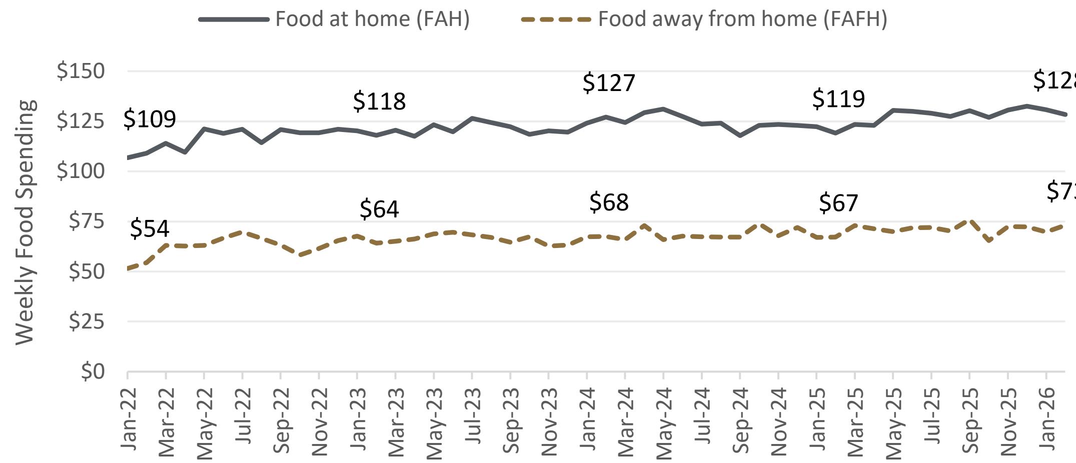
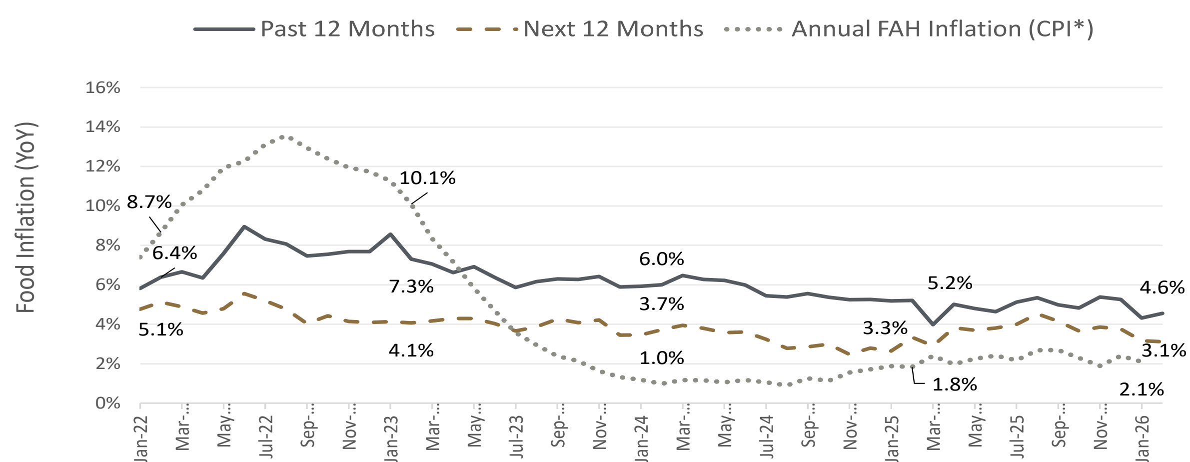


Figure 11. Consumer estimates of grocery price inflation compared to gov. estimate, Jan. 2022 - Feb. 2026



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

CONSUMER BEHAVIORS

How are consumers 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 12**).

Non-retiree survey participants report purchasing local foods more often than non-local foods compared to retirees. Additionally, non-retirees indicate they sometimes chose organic foods compared to retirees that rarely purchase organic foods. Non-retirees who sometimes checked how their food was produced, whereas retirees were less likely to do so.

Figure 12. Frequency of consumer shopping and eating habits by retiree and non-retiree, Feb. 2026

	Retiree	Non-Retiree
Chose generic foods over brand-name foods	3.2	3.3
Chose local foods over non-local foods	2.9	3.2
Chose wild-caught fish over farm-raised fish	2.8	3.1
Chose grass-fed beef over conventional beef	2.7	3.1
Chose cage-free eggs over conventional eggs	2.7	3.0
Chose organic foods over non-organic foods	2.4	3.0
Chose plant-based proteins over animal proteins	2.0	2.5
Checked the use-by/sell-by date at the store	4.1	4.0
Checked the nutrition label before buying new foods	3.4	3.5
Checked for natural or clean labels	2.8	3.2
Checked where my food originated	2.8	3.0
Checked for food recalls	2.8	3.0
Checked for GMO ingredients	2.6	2.9
Checked how my food was produced	2.5	3.0
Took steps to reduce food waste at home	4.0	3.7
Recycled food packaging	3.7	3.5
Threw away food past the use-by date	3.0	3.3
Composted food scraps	2.3	2.5
Ate fruits and vegetables without washing them	2.1	2.4
Ate rare or undercooked meat	1.7	2.1
Ate raw dough or batter	1.6	2.1

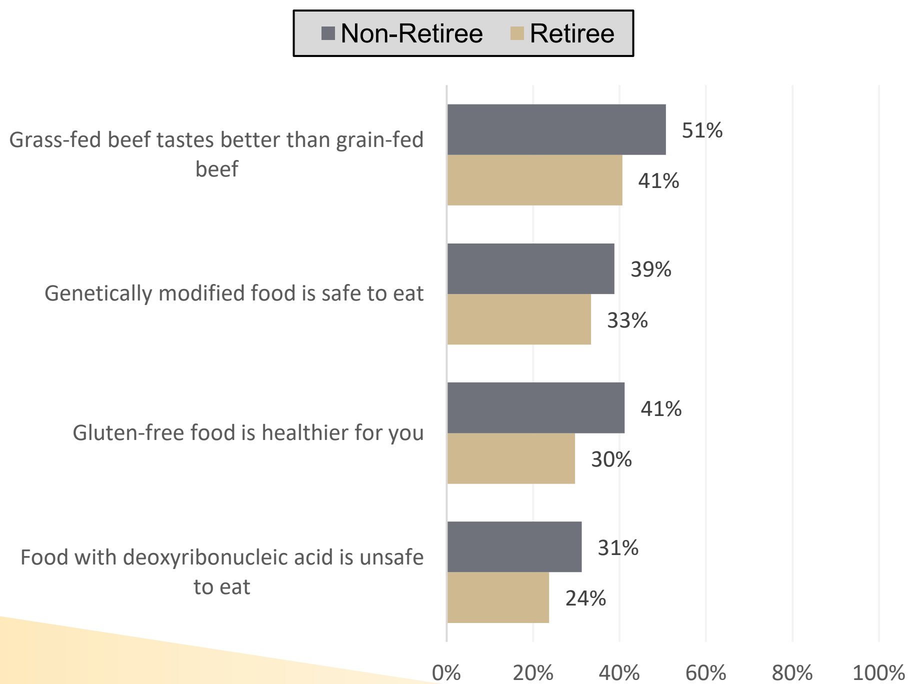
Mean Score	
5	Always
4	Often
3	Sometimes
2	Rarely
1	Never

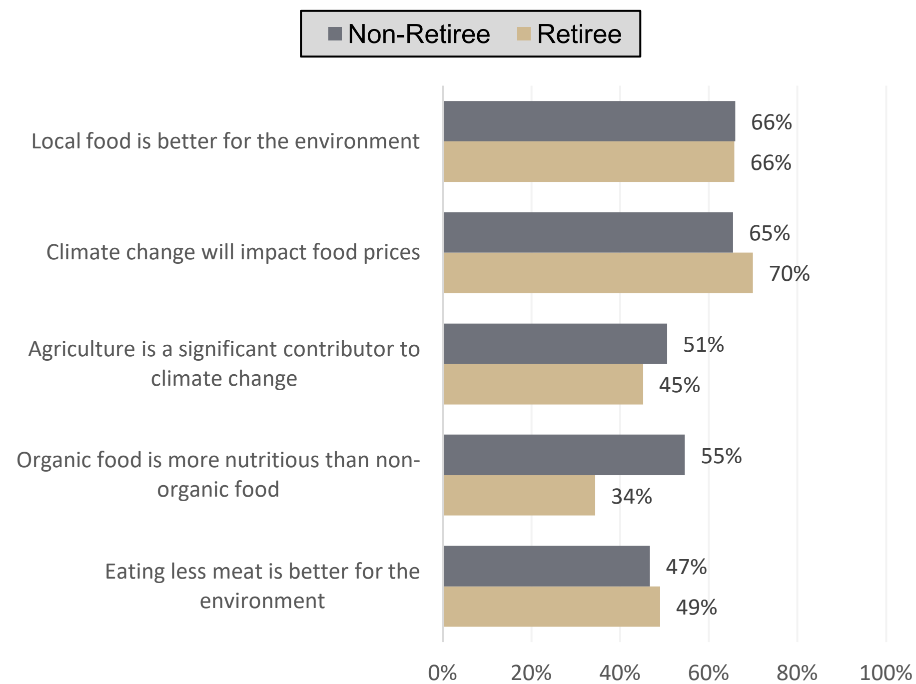
CONSUMER BELIEFS

What do Americans believe about their food and food system?

Figure 13 summarizes consumer agreement with various statements about the food system. Agreement varies between retirees and non-retirees on topics like grass-fed beef tasting better than grain-fed beef, gluten-free being healthier to consume, and organic food being more nutritious. On topics like climate change impacting food prices and eating less meat being better for the environment, retirees have more agreement than non-retirees.

Figure 13. Share of consumers who "somewhat agree" or "strongly agree" with claims about food by retiree vs. non-retiree, Feb. 2026





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).[7]

Figures 14 and **15** reveal distinct patterns in consumer trust across food-related information sources, by retiree and non-retiree. Retirees (31.5) have more trust in the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) than non-retirees (18.2). Similarly, retirees have more trust in the American Medical Association (AMA) (49.5) than those non-retirees (29.0). Both overweight and non-overweight consumers have similar distrust for CNN and Fox News.

Figure 14. Positive Trust index of food-related information, Feb. 2026

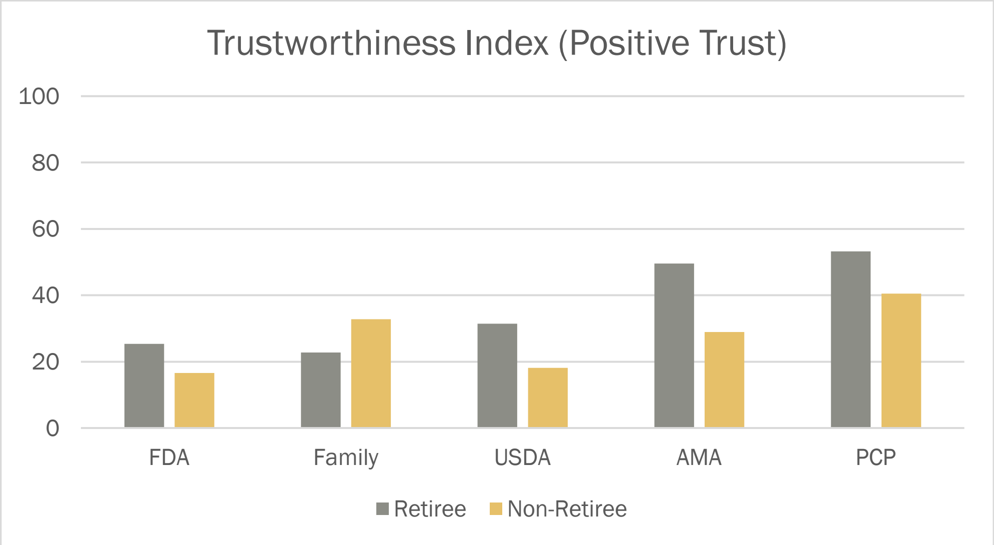
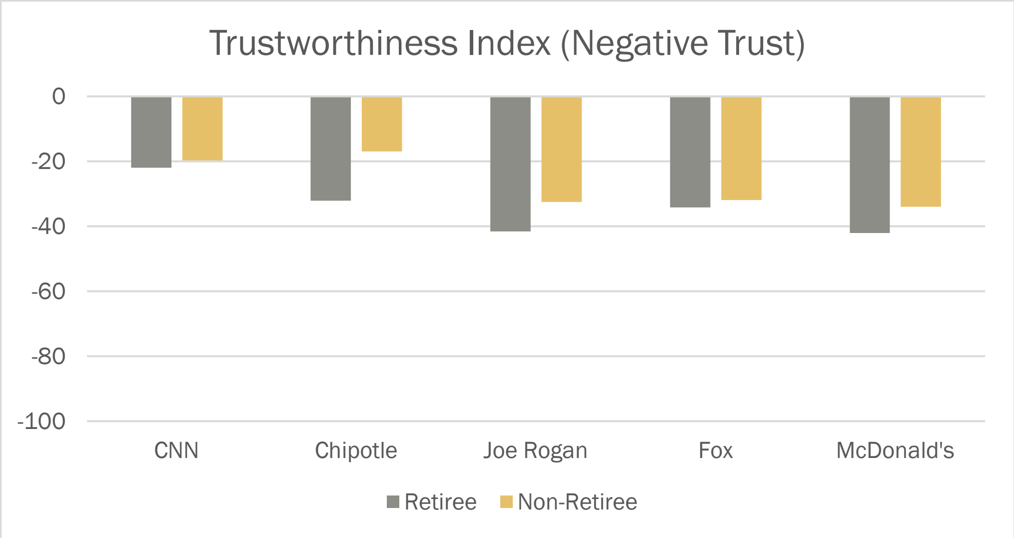


Figure 15. Negative Trust index of food-related information, Feb. 2026



ENDNOTES

1 Data were collected from an online opt-in panel maintained by the company Dynata over a four-day period from February 16-20, 2026. 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 (2024). Every respondent from the previous month was recontacted and asked to take the survey again. About 54% of January's sample participated this month, thus the rest of the sample was filled in with a new pool of respondents. 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 Descriptions of each attribute:

Nutrition (amount and type of fat, protein, vitamins, etc., are healthy and nourishing)
Environmental impact (production and consumption improve rather than damage environment)
Social responsibility (farmers, processors, retailers, workers, animals and consumers all benefit)
Affordability (food prices are reasonable, fit within your budget, and allow you lots of choices)
Availability (enough safe and desirable food is easy to find and physically accessible)
Taste (flavor and texture in your mouth are pleasing and high quality)

3 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.

ENDNOTES

4 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.
5 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.

6 The CFI question associated with this response summary specifically asks about future and past grocery prices. The BLS CPI estimate of inflation therefore reflects food-at-home (FAH).

7 Trust questions were not fielded in the Consumer Food Insights survey from October 2022 - December 2022. Starting June 2025, respondents were allowed to select up to 5 options for "most" and "least" trusted.