Vermonter Poll 2007
Food and Food Preparation

Prepared by Michele C. Schmidt
The Center for Rural Studies, University of Vermont
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Introduction

The Vermonter Poll is an annual public opinion survey of Vermont residents who are 18 years of age and older, conducted by the Center for Rural Studies at the University of Vermont, to gage Vermonter's opinions on current issues of interest to non-profit agencies, government officials, and researchers. On the 2007 Vermonter Poll, sixteen questions were asked of residents to gage their use of various ingredients and cooking skills when preparing dinner during a week time frame, the importance of cooking skills and healthful eating, and aspects of meal planning and food preparation that impact the way one prepared meals at home (See Appendix A for a complete list of questions).

Methodology

The data used in this report were collected by the Center for Rural Studies at the University of Vermont as part of the annual Vermonter Poll. The survey was conducted between the hours of 4:00 p.m. and 9:00 p.m. beginning on February 26, 2007 and ending on March 8, 2007. The telephone polling was conducted from the University of Vermont using computer-aided telephone interviewing (CATI). The sample for the poll was drawn through random digit dialing and used all of the telephone exchanges in the state of Vermont as the sampling frame. Only Vermont residents over the age of eighteen were interviewed. The poll included questions on a variety of issues related to public policy in the state of Vermont. There were 636 respondents to the 2007 Vermonter Poll (Version II). The results based on a group of this size have a margin of error of plus or minus 3.8 percent at a confidence interval of 95 percent.

Findings

Use of Ingredients

Respondents were asked "Of the past seven days, when preparing dinner, how many days did you work with the following items?" The frequency, percentage, and measures of central tendencies are presented below for each of the following ingredients. On average, Vermonters surveyed use fresh or frozen produce an average of 5.5 out of 7 days per week, followed by fresh or frozen meat or fish, which is used an average of 4.6 out of 7 days per week. In general, people use canned food about 2 days out of a week and use convenience and boxed meals about 1 day or less per week. The frequency, percentages and measures of central tendencies for each ingredient type are presented in Tables 1a-1e.

Table 1. Means comparison of use of ingredients from 0 to 7 days in a given week

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Fresh or frozen produce	5.5	1.998	581
Fresh or frozen meat or fish	4.6	2.182	580
Canned food	2.3	2.042	581
Convenience food	.96	1.483	581
Boxed meals	.59	1.129	582

Table 1a.

Fresh or frozen produce		
	Frequency	Percent
0	16	3
1	14	2
2	28	5
3	49	8
4	65	11
5	67	12
6	17	3
7	325	56

(n=581)

Mean	5.49
Median	7.00
Mode	7

Table 1b.

Fresh or frozen meat or fish		
	Frequency	Percent
0	26	5
1	28	5
2	61	11
3	72	12
4	78	13
5	83	14
6	34	6
7	198	34

(n=580)

Mean	4.63
Median	5.00
Mode	7

Table 1c.

Canned Food		
	Frequency	Percent
0	125	22
1	122	21
2	99	17
3	104	18
4	47	8
5	27	5
6	12	2
7	45	8

(n=581)

Mean	2.31
Median	2.00
Mode	0

Table 1d.

Convenience food such as pre-prepared meals that just need to be heated		
	Frequency	Percent
0	320	55
1	119	21
2	76	13
3	26	5
4	16	3
5	11	2
6	1	0.2
7	12	2

(n=581)

Mean	0.59
Median	0.00
Mode	0

Table 1e.

Boxed meals such as macaroni and cheese?		
	Frequency	Percent
0	392	67
1	109	19
2	42	7
3	22	4
4	8	1
5	3	1
6	2	0.3
7	4	1

(n=582)

Mean	0.59
Median	0.00
Mode	0

Cooking and Healthful Eating

Respondents were asked their level of agreement or disagreement with the statement "better cooking skills lead to a healthier diet." In general, 86% of Vermonters agree or strongly agree that the better cooking skills lead to a healthier diet (Table 2).

Table 2. Agreement and disagreement level that better cooking skills lead to a healthier diet

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	293	50
Agree	208	36
Neither agree nor disagree	41	7
Disagree	32	6
Strongly disagree	7	1

(n=581)

Respondents were also asked "Does a concern for health affect the way you prepare meals at home?" Table 3 shows that an overwhelming 92% of respondents indicated that the way they prepare food at home is impacted by their concern for their health.

Table 3. Whether or not concern for health affects the way respondents prepare meals at home

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	531	92
No	49	8

(n=580)

When asked, "Which aspect of meal planning and food preparation is most affected by your concern for health?", almost two thirds of respondents indicated that ingredients they purchase is most affected. This was followed by 12% who indicated cooking techniques and 11% who indicated portion size. Fifteen percent indicated "other", with the majority noting that they look at all three areas or a combination of areas 1 and 2, 2 and 3 and 1 and 3. Other specific responses included sugar content, low-sodium, and no preservatives.

Table 4. Aspect of meal planning and food preparation that is most affected by respondent's concern for health

	Frequency	Percent
The ingredients you purchase	332	63
The cooking techniques you use	65	12
The portions you serve	56	11
Other	78	15

(n=531)

Use of Meal Preparation Methods

In addition to types of ingredients that people use, respondents were also asked "Of the past seven days, when preparing dinner, how many days did you use the following cooking methods?" Table 5 shows that the most commonly used meal preparation method used an average of 3.6 days a week is dicing or chopping foods. This is followed by boiling water (average of 3.4 times per week), simmering foods (average of 2.6 times per week) and microwaving foods (average of 2 times per week). Lesser used methods including sautéing, steaming, roasting, and slow cooking foods. The frequency, percentages and measures of central tendencies for each ingredient type are presented in Tables 5a-5h in the order in which the methods were asked on the survey.

Table 5. Means comparison of use of preparation methods from 0 to 7 days in a given week

	Mean	**Std. Deviation**	**N**
Diced or chopped	3.6	2.326	575
Boiled water	3.4	2.254	574
Simmered foods such as rice or soup	2.6	1.784	574
Microwaved food	2.1	2.476	575
Sautéed foods	1.9	1.752	576
Steamed foods	1.9	2.053	578
Roasted foods	1.2	1.386	575
Slow cooked foods	1.2	1.581	571

Table 5a.

Boiled water		
	Frequency	Percent
0	58	10
1	70	12
2	103	18
3	101	18
4	71	12
5	51	9
6	15	3
7	105	18

(n=574)

Mean	3.39
Median	3.00
Mode	7

Table 5b.

Steamed foods		
	Frequency	Percent
0	224	39
1	83	14
2	88	15
3	68	12
4	44	8
5	30	5
6	8	1
7	33	6

Mean	1.85
Median	1.00
Mode	0

(n=578)

Table 5c.

Sautéed foods		
	Frequency	Percent
0	116	29
1	115	20
2	108	19
3	95	17
4	45	8
5	26	5
6	4	1
7	17	3

Mean	1.86
Median	2.00
Mode	0

(n=576)

Table 5d.

Diced or Chopped Food		
	Frequency	Percent
0	64	11
1	57	10
2	101	18
3	86	15
4	66	12
5	64	11
6	20	4
7	117	20

Mean	3.55
Median	3.00
Mode	7

(n=575)

Table 5e.

Slow cooked food		
	Frequency	Percent
0	247	44
1	159	28
2	71	12
3	45	8
4	24	4
5	6	1
6	4	1
7	15	3

Mean	1.21
Median	1.00
Mode	0

(n=571)

Table 5f.

Roasted foods		
	Frequency	Percent
0	221	38
1	162	28
2	101	18
3	57	10
4	14	2
5	11	2
6	4	1
7	5	1

Mean	1.23
Median	1.00
Mode	0

(n=575)

Table 5g.

Microwave foods		
	Frequency	Percent
0	252	44
1	60	10
2	61	11
3	48	8
4	35	6
5	35	6
6	16	3
7	68	12

Mean	2.11
Median	1.00
Mode	0

(n=575)

Table 5h.

Simmered foods such as rice or soup		
	Frequency	Percent
0	64	11
1	98	17
2	149	26
3	113	20
4	68	12
5	40	7
6	14	2
7	28	5

Mean	2.59
Median	2.00
Mode	2

(n=574)

Conclusions

The sample of Vermonters surveyed appear to have healthful eating habits or are aware of what leads to a healthy diet. In a given week, Vermonters surveyed most often use fresh or frozen produce, followed by fresh or frozen meat or fish. In general, people use canned food, convenience and boxed meals less often in a week. The most commonly used meal preparation methods include dicing or chopping foods, boiling water, simmering foods, and microwaving foods. Lesser used methods including sautéing, steaming, roasting, and slow cooking foods. In total, 86% of Vermonters agree or strongly agree that the better cooking skills lead to a healthier diet and an overwhelming 92% indicated that the way they prepare food at home is impacted by their concern for health. Interestingly, respondents focused on the type of ingredients as being most affected by their concern for health, and less by cooking techniques and portion sizes. However, many respondents could not choose one main method and indicated that all three areas are equally important and other specific responses included sugar content, low-sodium, and no preservatives.

Appendix A. List of Questions asked on Vermonter Poll II

Q: q32 **********
The next questions are about food and food security.

Of the past seven days, when preparing dinner, how many days did you work with the following items?

Fresh or frozen produce

Number of days from 0 to 7

Q: q32b **********
Fresh or frozen meat or fish

Number of days from 0 to 7

Q: q32c **********
Canned food

Number of days from 0 to 7

Q: q32d **********
Convenience food such as pre-prepared meals that just need to be heated

Number of days from 0 to 7

Q: q32e **********
Boxed meals such as macaroni and cheese

Number of days from 0 to 7

Q: q33 **********
Please listen to the following statement and indicate
your level of agreement or disagreement.

Better cooking skills lead to a healthier diet. Do you...

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't know [DO NOT READ]
7. Refused [DO NOT READ]

Q: q33a **********
Does a concern for health affect the way you prepare meals at home?

1 Yes
2 No
3 Don't know [DO NOT READ]
4 Refused [DO NOT READ]

Q: q33b **********
Which aspect of meal planning and food preparation is most affected
by your concern for health?

1 The ingredients you purchase
2 The cooking techniques you use
3 The portions you serve
4 Other (specify)
5 Don't know [DO NOT READ]
6 Refused [DO NOT READ]

Q: q33c **********
Of the past seven days, when preparing dinner,
how many days did you use the following cooking methods?

Boiled water

Number of days from 0 to 7

Q: q33d **********
Steamed foods

Number of days from 0 to 7

Q: q33e **********
Sautéed foods

Number of days from 0 to 7

Q: q33f **********
Diced or chopped foods

Number of days from 0 to 7

Q: q33g **********
Slow cooked foods

Number of days from 0 to 7

Q: q33h **********
Roasted foods

Number of days from 0 to 7

Q: q33i **********

Microwaved food

Number of days from 0 to 7

Q: q33j **********
Simmered foods such as rice or soup

Number of days from 0 to 7