

## Study Reveals Impact of Rising Food Prices on Canadians' Food Safety Practices

**HALIFAX, April 24, 2024** — Food safety is crucial for all Canadians and the broader food industry. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency estimates that each year, more than 4 million Canadians are affected by foodborne illnesses. With the rise in food prices, there are concerns that some Canadians might be compromising their health by consuming potentially unsafe foods simply because they cannot afford to waste any food. In collaboration with **Caddle**, Dalhousie University's **Agri-Food Analytics Lab** conducted a study to explore how Canadians are managing food safety risks at home amidst escalating food costs. The study surveyed 9,109 Canadians throughout April 2024.

### Consuming Risky Foods

When asked if higher food prices influenced their willingness to consume food close to or past its "best before date", 58.0% of respondents said they were more inclined to do so. In contrast, 37.0% reported that higher prices have not changed their consumption habits. Among the 58.0% who are willing to consume such food, 23.1% indicated they always eat food that is past their "best before dates" or appears overripe. Meanwhile, 38.6% often consume such food, and 30.8% do so sometimes. Only 7.5% rarely consume food under these conditions. Notably, nearly half of the Canadians who consume potentially risky food were uncertain about its safety. A total of 48.0% were unsure whether eating such food might lead to illness.

### Getting Sick

Generation	Percentage Believing They Have Gotten Sick After Eating Potentially Unsafe Food Product In the Last Year
Millennials (1980-1996)	41%
Generation X (1965-1980)	24%
Baby Boomers (1946-1964)	20%
The Greatest Generation (Before 1946)	10%
Generation Z (1997-2005)	10%

We also asked if they experienced any health issues or food poisoning that they suspect were related to consuming food that was close to or past its "best before date". Results were quite alarming. A total of 20.0% of Canadians claim that they have gotten sick after consuming food that was close to or past its "best before date". The breakdown of generations gives a good idea of which group is more under pressure due to higher food prices. Millennials (Born 1980-1996) are the group where the number of respondents who believe they have gotten sick is troubling. While 41.0% of Millennials, 24.0% of Gen Xs (Born 1965-1980) feel the same. Boomers (Born

1946-1964) are third at 20.0%, followed by The Great Generation (Born before 1946), and Gen Zs (Born 1997-2005), at 10.0%.

### **Keeping Food Longer**

We also inquired whether Canadians have altered their food storage or preparation habits to extend the shelf life of food in response to rising prices. Examples of strategies Canadians might use include freezing bread to prevent mold, storing vegetables in humidity-controlled drawers to maintain freshness, and using vacuum-sealed containers to keep leftovers edible for longer periods. It may also mean that they bought more equipment like a freezer. A total of 47.0% of Canadians have said they have changed their approach to conserving food to extend the shelf-life of products.

### **Overall View on Food Safety and Inflation**

<b>Province</b>	<b>% Believing Food Less Safe Due to Prices</b>
Nova Scotia	39.4
Newfoundland and Labrador	32.0
British Columbia	28.3
Ontario	28.1
Alberta	26.0
Saskatchewan	24.9
Quebec	24.2
New Brunswick	23.3
Manitoba	23.2
Prince Edward Island	15.8

The investigation also looked at how Canadians perceive food safety to have been impacted by food inflation in the last year. This could mean that Canadians think that some food is either contaminated more often, or that some food products are fraudulent and may have been adulterated. Only 8.5% of Canadians feel food is safer than 12 months ago. While a total of 26.9% feel it is less safe, a total of 35.5% believe food inflation has had no impact on the safety of our food. Additionally, the majority of Canadians, 50.1%, believe food inflation and higher food prices have forced them to take more risks with their food.

## Quotes

*"The findings from our study at the Agri-Food Analytics Lab highlight a concerning trend: as food prices climb, more Canadians are taking risks with their food safety. This behavior, driven by economic necessity, exposes a critical vulnerability in our food system where food security and food safety intersect. It's imperative that we address these issues collectively to ensure that no Canadian must choose between economic hardship and their health,"* stated **Dr. Sylvain Charlebois**, Director of the Agri-Food Analytics Lab at Dalhousie University.

"Through our research, we've observed a significant shift in how Canadians manage their food at home, driven by the need to adapt to increasing food costs. Many are extending the life of their food products through various storage techniques, which can be seen as a positive adaptive strategy. However, the fact that nearly half of the participants are uncertain about the safety of the food they consume underlines the need for better consumer education and support to navigate these challenges safely," said **Janet Music**, Manager of the Agri-Food Analytics Lab at Dalhousie University.

## About the Agri-Food Analytics Lab

The Agri-Food Analytics Lab at Dalhousie University is a research unit dedicated to providing valuable insights into the food and agriculture sectors. Their interdisciplinary team of experts researches various aspects of the food supply chain, offering data-driven solutions to inform industry stakeholders and policymakers.

**Methodology:** The survey conducted in April 2024 and a total of 9,109 respondents. This number is both the weighted and unweighted total, indicating that each respondent was counted once in the analysis, and any adjustments made to ensure representativeness did not change the total count of respondents. The margin of error for the survey, assuming a 95% confidence level, is approximately 1.92%. This means that the results of the survey are expected to be within  $\pm 0.63$  percentage points of what would have been obtained if the entire population had been surveyed, 95 times out of 100.

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