

ANNUAL FOOD & BEVERAGE INDUSTRY CONSUMER INSIGHT REPORT | MAY 2022

WHAT CONSUMERS THINK ABOUT FOOD AND BEVERAGE MANUFACTURING FACILITIES



For the last three years, we have been gathering and analyzing data on consumer attitudes toward food and beverage manufacturing plants, with a specific emphasis on food safety, plant hygiene, and consumer trust.

We conducted our first survey in May of 2020, roughly six weeks into the COVID-19 global pandemic.

At that point, the pandemic had already caused temporary plant closures, most publicly in the meat processing sector, and exposed weaknesses in the food supply chain, bringing increased national attention — not all of it positive. Meanwhile, food and beverage manufacturers were making large-scale operational changes that included new protocols around physical distancing, employee illness, use of personal protective equipment, and sanitation.

Given the increased media attention on food safety, we sought to understand how consumer sentiment

toward food and beverage manufacturers and processors had been affected by current events. Since then, we have replicated the survey each year in order to determine how these shifting factors continue to impact the industry.

Much has changed since May of 2020. Today, the food and beverage industry faces new and different challenges — some of them ripple effects of the pandemic — but, at the same time, there are new and exciting opportunities for innovative manufacturers to leverage. Read on for further analysis and actionable takeaways.

WHAT WE LEARNED IN 2020 & 2021

In May of 2020, nearly three-quarters of respondents said that they were either **somewhat confident, not so confident**, or **not at all confident** that the majority of the food in their local grocery store was processed in a hygienic plant – and 35% said their confidence level had dropped since the start of the pandemic.

On the bright side, we found that the uncertainty brought about by the early days of the pandemic also presented an opportunity for food and beverage manufacturers to increase their proactive, direct-to-consumer communication. About half of respondents we surveyed had become more interested in where food comes from, and the same number of respondents actually wanted to hear from food and beverage manufacturers about the safety of their food.

When we again surveyed consumers in the spring of 2021, we found that they continued to show a strong interest in where their food comes from, with nearly half saying that they had become more interested in the last 3 months.

Concern over food plant hygiene was still an issue, with around two-thirds of respondents reporting that they were **somewhat confident, not so confident**, or **not at all confident** that the majority of the food in their local grocery store was processed in a hygienic plant – and 1 in 4 saying they were less confident than they had been 3 months before. Confidence levels had improved since May of 2020... but only slightly.

WHAT'S CHANGED IN 2022

In May of 2022, we again surveyed a representative sample of consumers to discover how they feel about the facilities where their food is produced. In addition to the pandemic continuing to weigh on U.S. consumers, other topics that affect food and beverage manufacturing have been getting a lot of media attention, including supply chain issues, labor practices, and climate change. The sanitary practices of food production facilities, though, remain an important issue.

Perhaps surprisingly, this year's survey shows that confidence in food plant hygiene has dropped back to spring 2020 levels. Three-quarters of respondents said that they were either **somewhat confident, not so confident**, or **not at all confident** that the majority of the food in their local grocery store was processed in a hygienic plant.

More than half of respondents are most concerned about the sanitary practices of meat and poultry processing plants, while around a quarter rated food and vegetable processing facilities as their top concern.

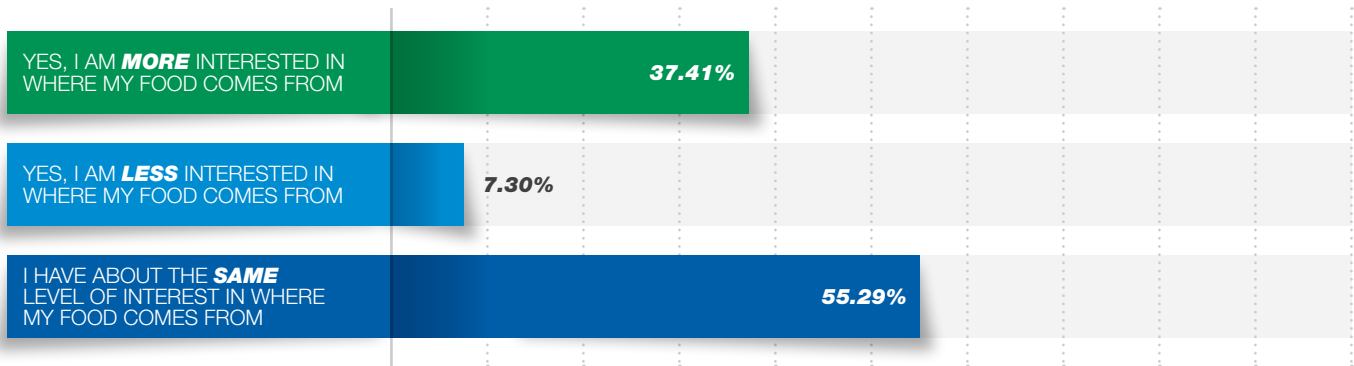
As in previous years, respondents were able to leave comments and elaborate on their choices. A review of the qualitative data revealed an emerging concern: the hygienic practices of pet food processing facilities.

Another new concern for food and beverage facilities to consider: over half of respondents reported that it is either **extremely important** or **very important** to them that their food is processed and packaged in energy-efficient facilities.

[LET'S TAKE A LOOK AT THE DATA.](#)

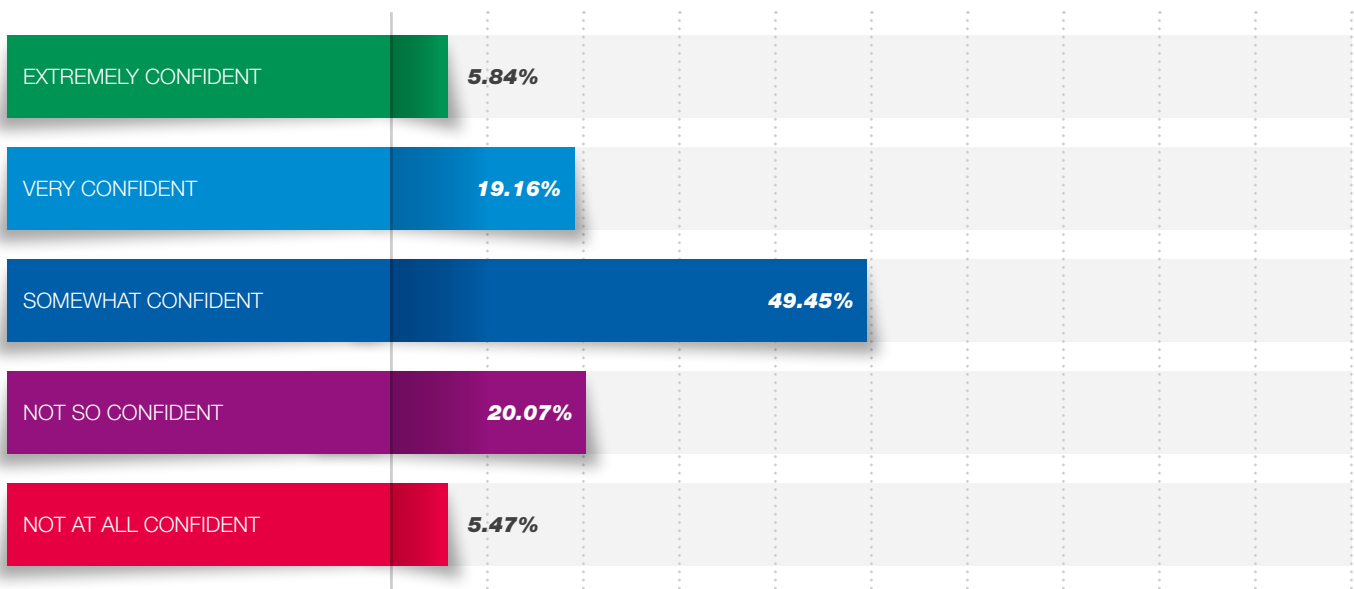
QUESTION 1

Over the past three months, has your interest in where your food comes from changed?



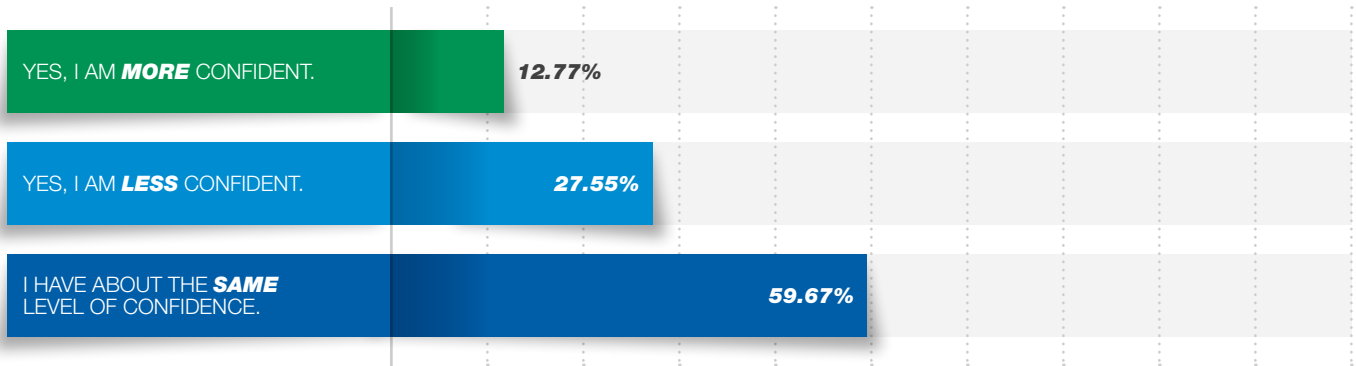
QUESTION 2

How confident are you that the majority of the food in your local grocery store is processed in a hygienic plant?



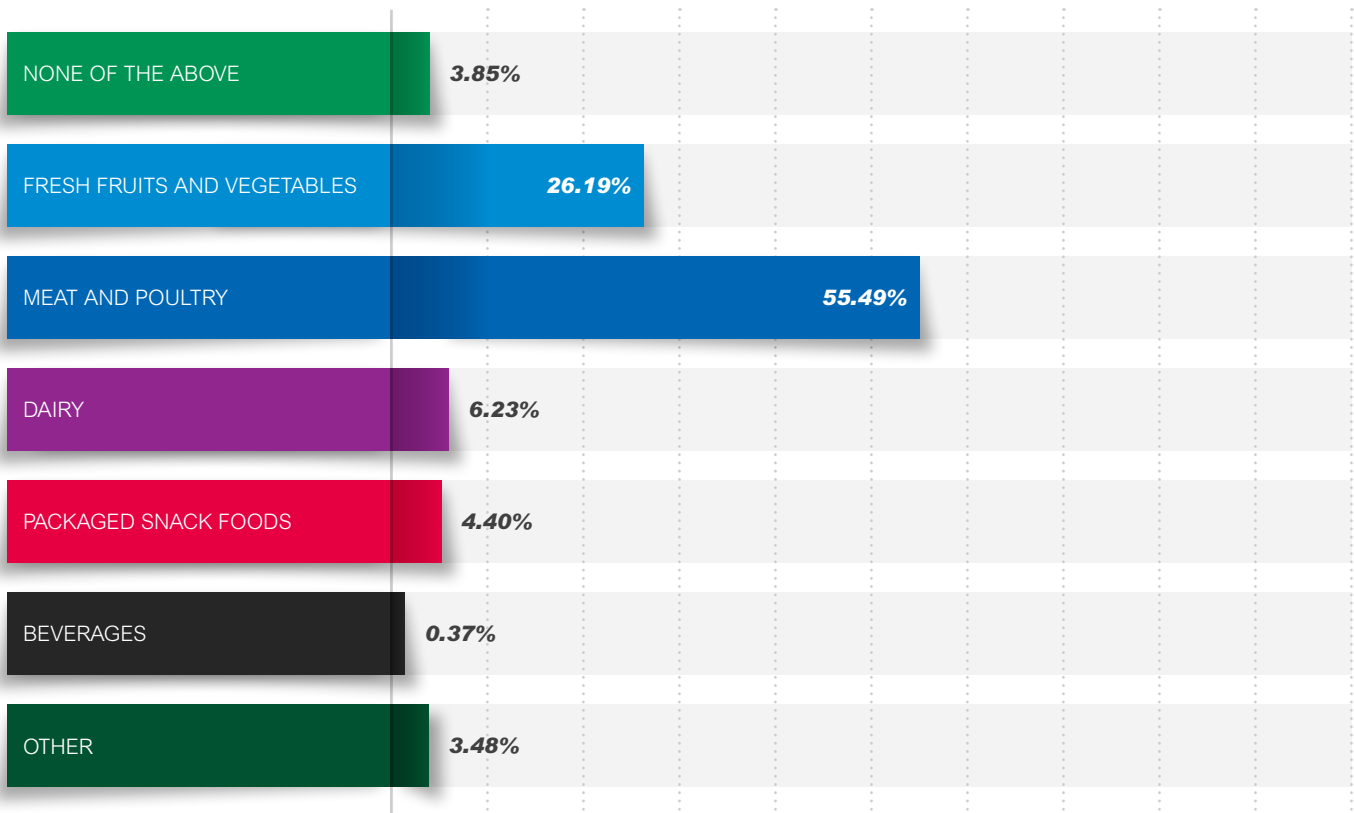
QUESTION 3

Over the past three months, has your level of confidence in the hygienic practices of food processors and manufacturers changed?



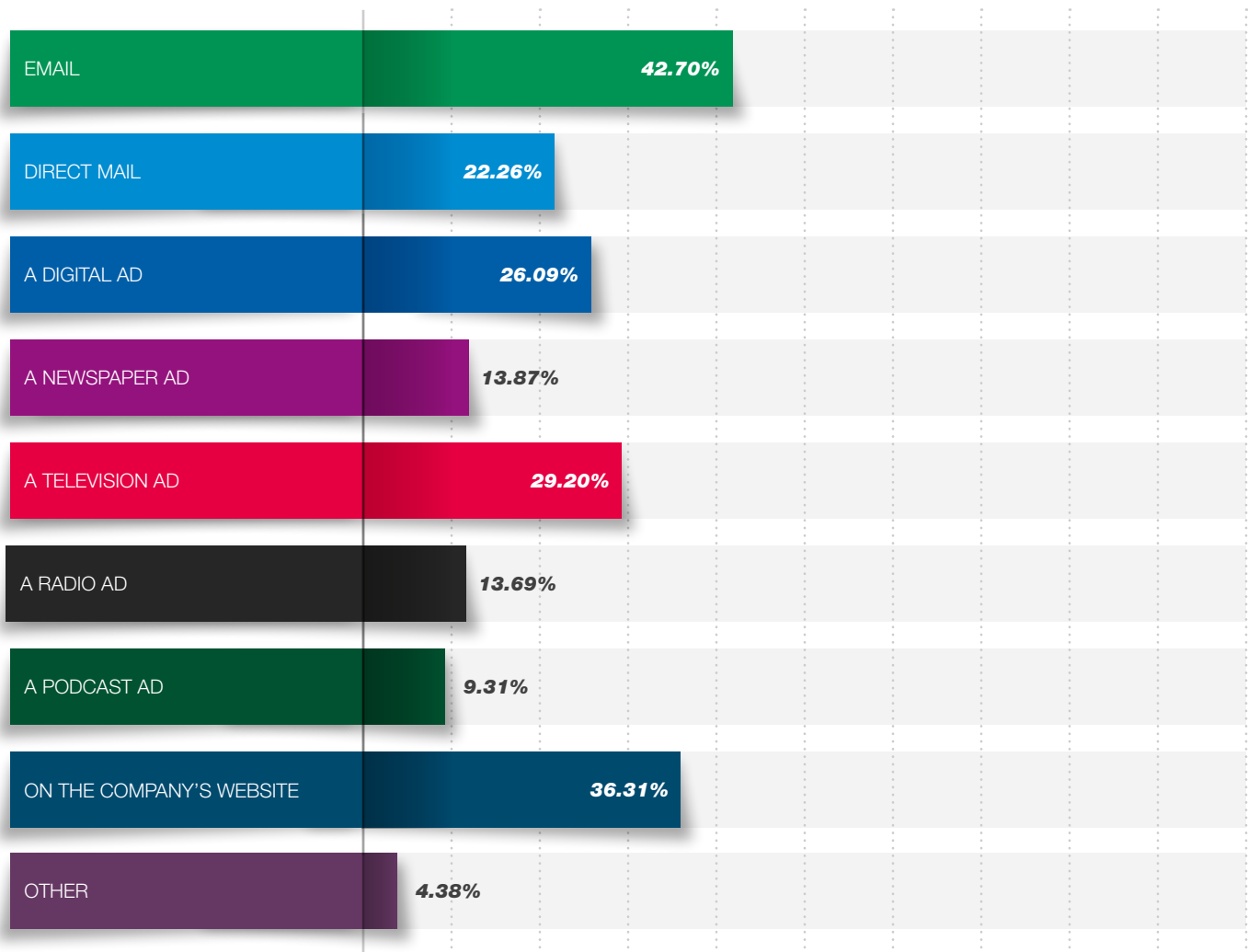
QUESTION 4

When it comes to the hygienic practices of food processors and manufacturers, which types of food are you most concerned about?



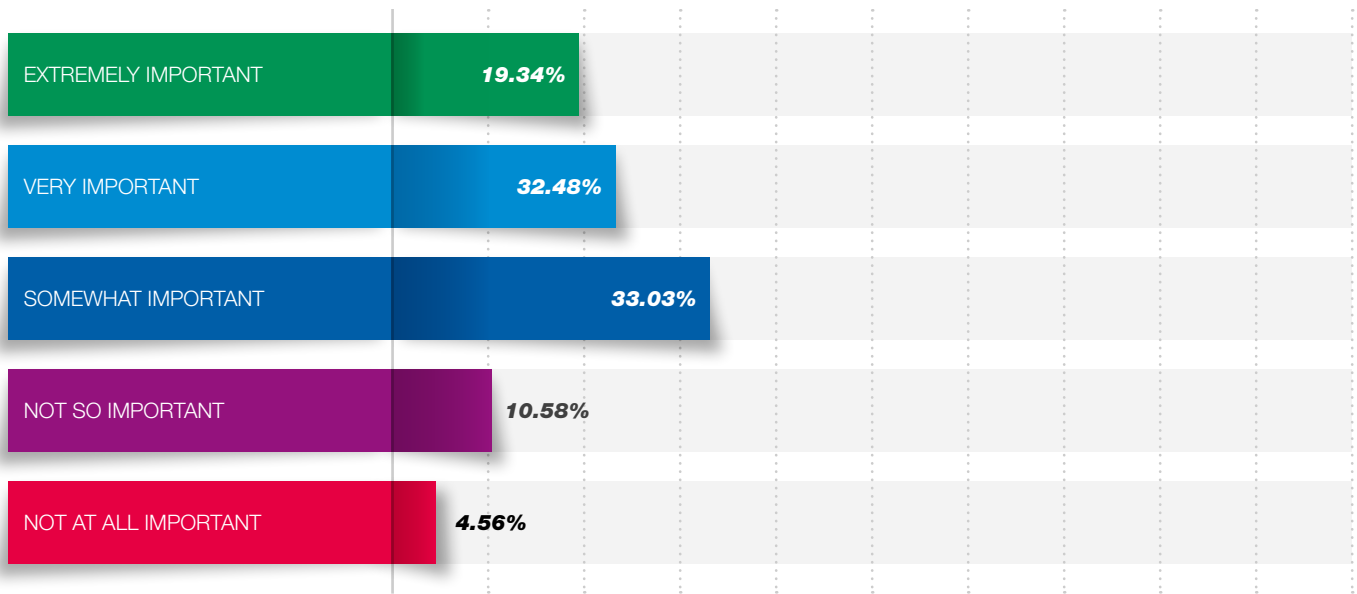
QUESTION 5

If you were to receive communication from the processors and manufacturers behind the food brands you love about their hygienic practices, in which formats would you like to receive that information? Select all that apply



QUESTION 6

How important to you is it that your food is processed and packaged in energy-efficient facilities?



THREE OPPORTUNITIES FOR FOOD & BEVERAGE MANUFACTURERS

1) Model Transparency Around Food Safety and Hygiene

Combat fear of the unknown with clear, proactive communication. Many consumers are still unaware of the regulations and standards, such as FSMA, with which food and beverage plants comply. It may help to provide educational, direct-to-consumer information about the investments and commitments your company has made to help ensure food safety and hygiene, including safety protocols, hygienic design equipment, and food safety technologies.

2) Engineer New or Retrofitted Facilities for Advanced Cleanliness and Efficiency

Pet ownership increased during the pandemic, driving demand for pet food and leading to both new pet food processing facilities and the retrofitting of existing facilities for new products. Whether your organization is expanding its footprint or upgrading an older plant, integrate hygienic design into your automation solutions from the start.

At a minimum, electrical controls should be protected by hygienic design enclosures and cooled by hygienic design climate control units. Hygienic design protection also exists for perimeter items like monitors, fire extinguishers, and printers – any equipment that must be near open processes or subject to frequent washdowns.

3) Prioritize Sustainability – For Consumers and For Your Bottom Line

Consumers are more conscious about environmental issues than ever before, so it should be no surprise that their interest in sustainability extends to the companies that produce their favorite food and beverage products. If sustainability is not already a core part of your company's mission, there's no time like the present. Plus, focusing on specific energy usage reduction goals can have the added benefit of lowering your energy costs and the total cost of your operations.

For manufacturers who rely on automated production lines, industrial enclosure cooling units are a good place to start. First, seek to understand how much energy the units that cool your electrical enclosures are currently expending. Then, make a plan to lower energy usage over time by repairing or replacing underperforming units. If older units need to be replaced, upgrade to the most energy-efficient model available to maximize your efficiency gains.

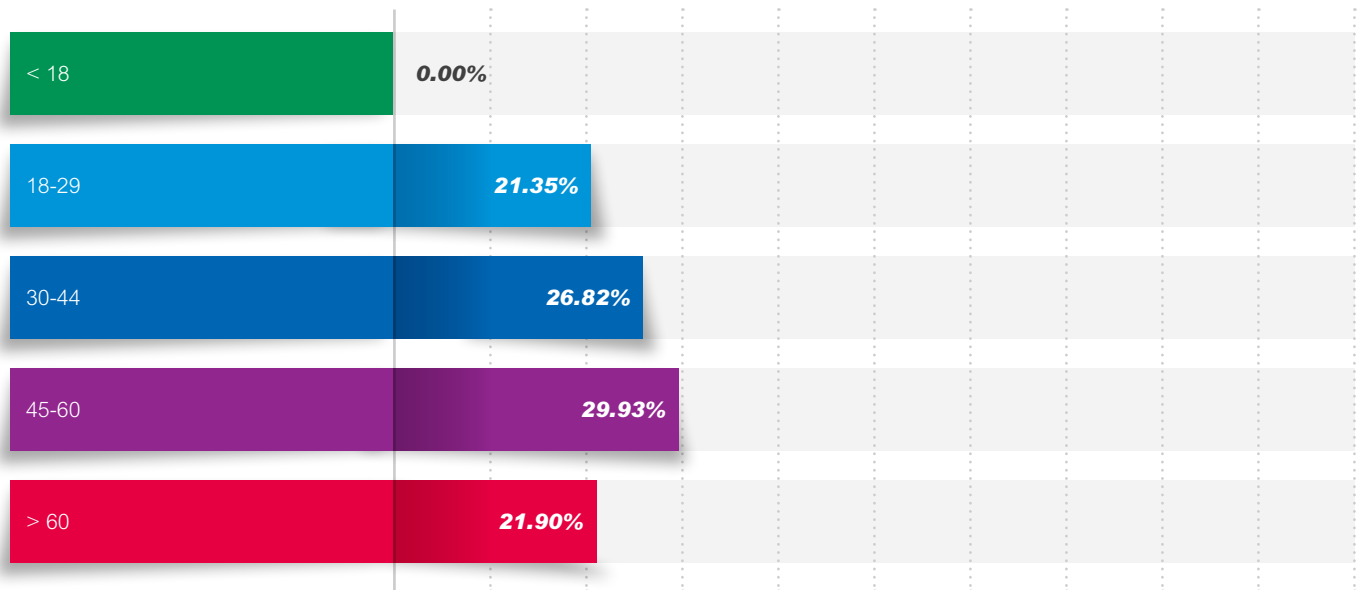
Finally, consider implementing IIoT technologies that monitor the usage of your enclosure cooling units and alert you when temperature fluctuations are outside the required parameters. Not only can this act of preventative maintenance keep you from wasting energy on unnecessary cooling, but it can also help you prevent downtime by fixing air conditioner issues before they cause a line stoppage.

RESEARCH METHODS

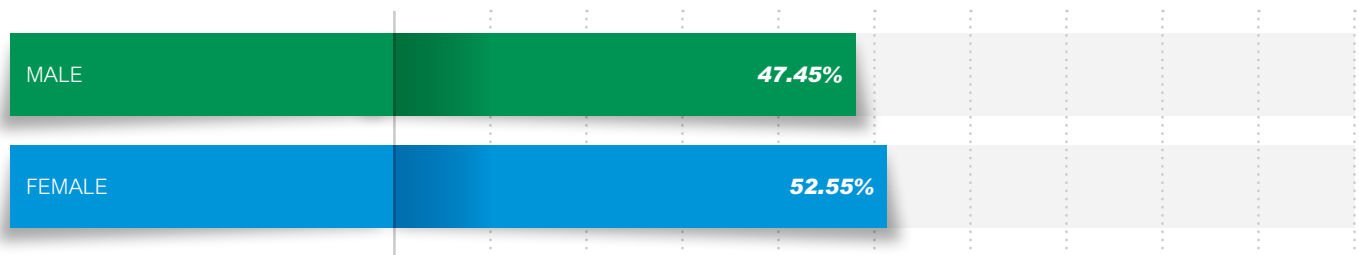
This report reflects the results of a nationally representative online survey of 548 respondents conducted on April 7, 2022. The collection of responses was census balanced by age and gender to collect a representative sample that reflects U.S. demographics. The margin of error for 548 responses is +/- 4.272%.

LET'S TAKE A LOOK AT THE DATA.

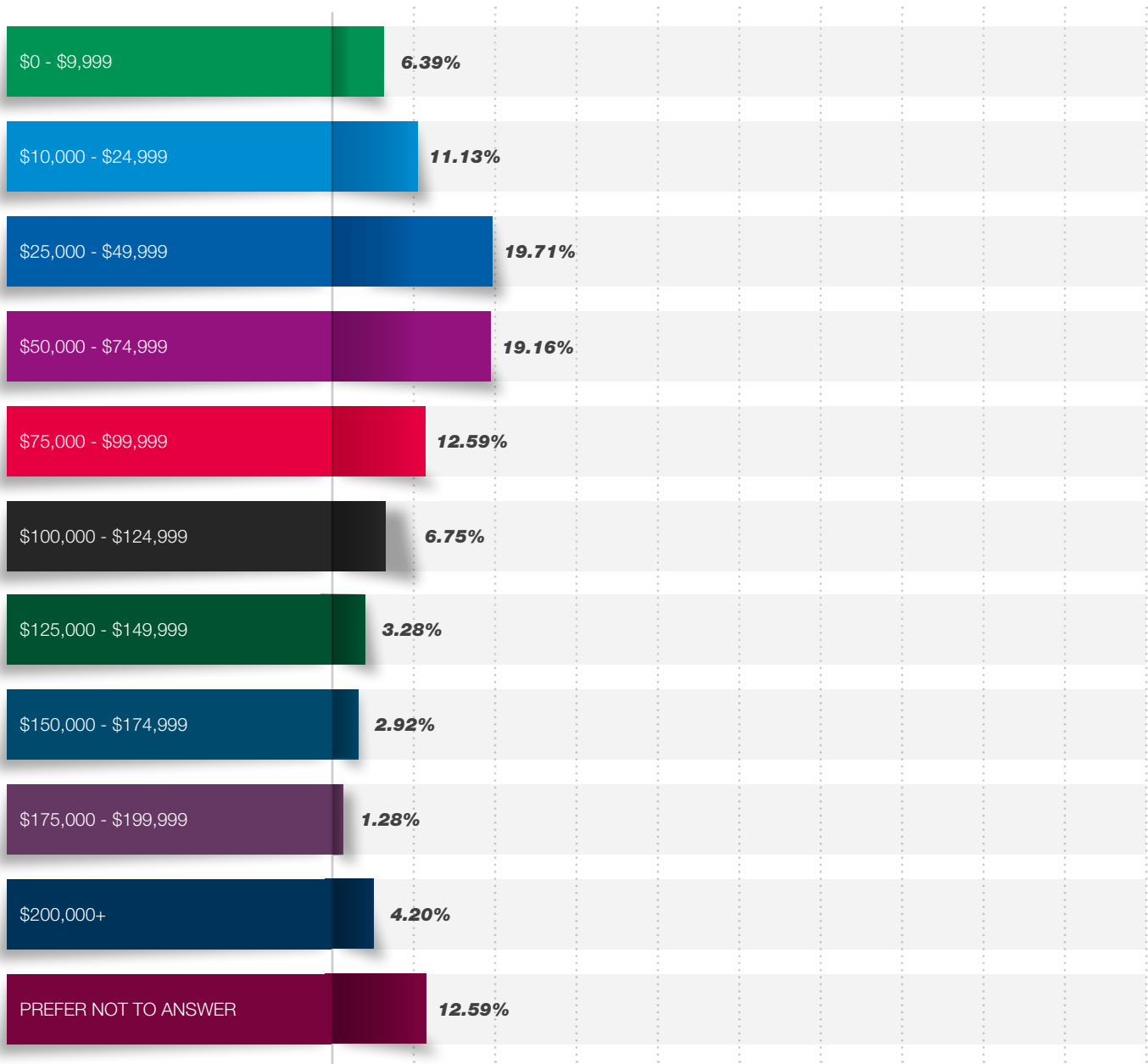
Age



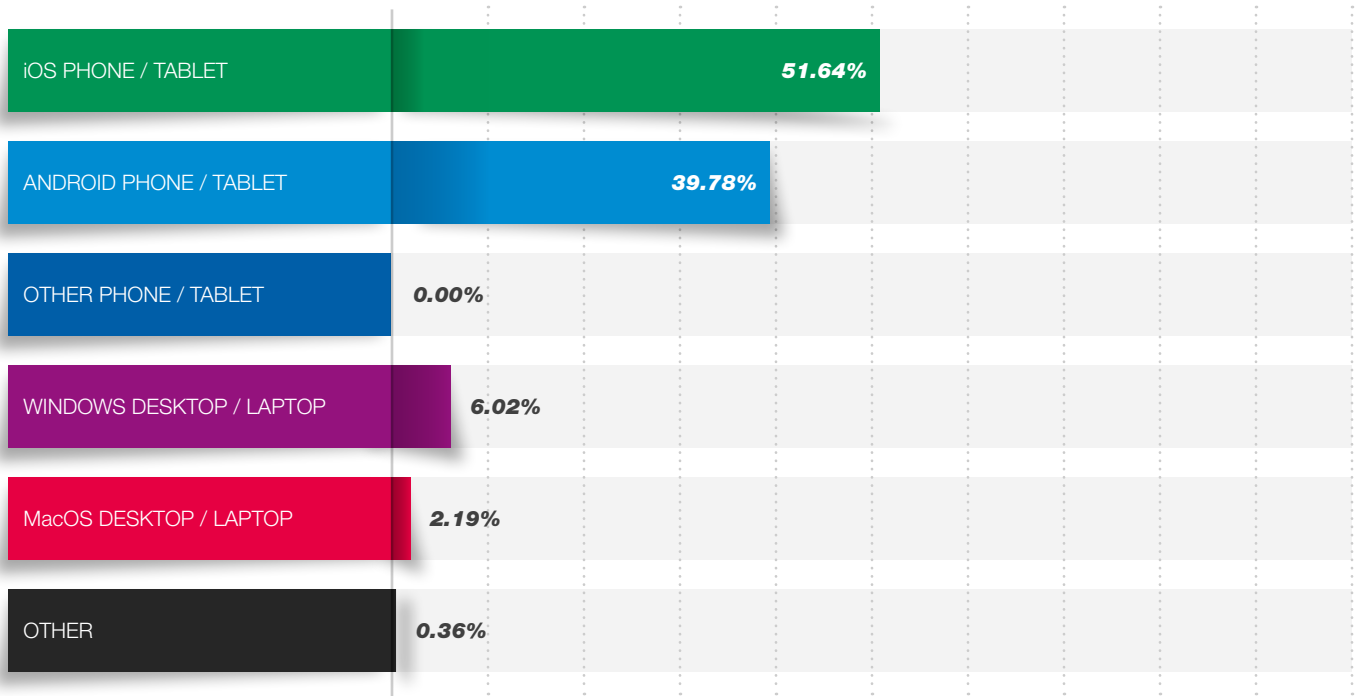
Gender



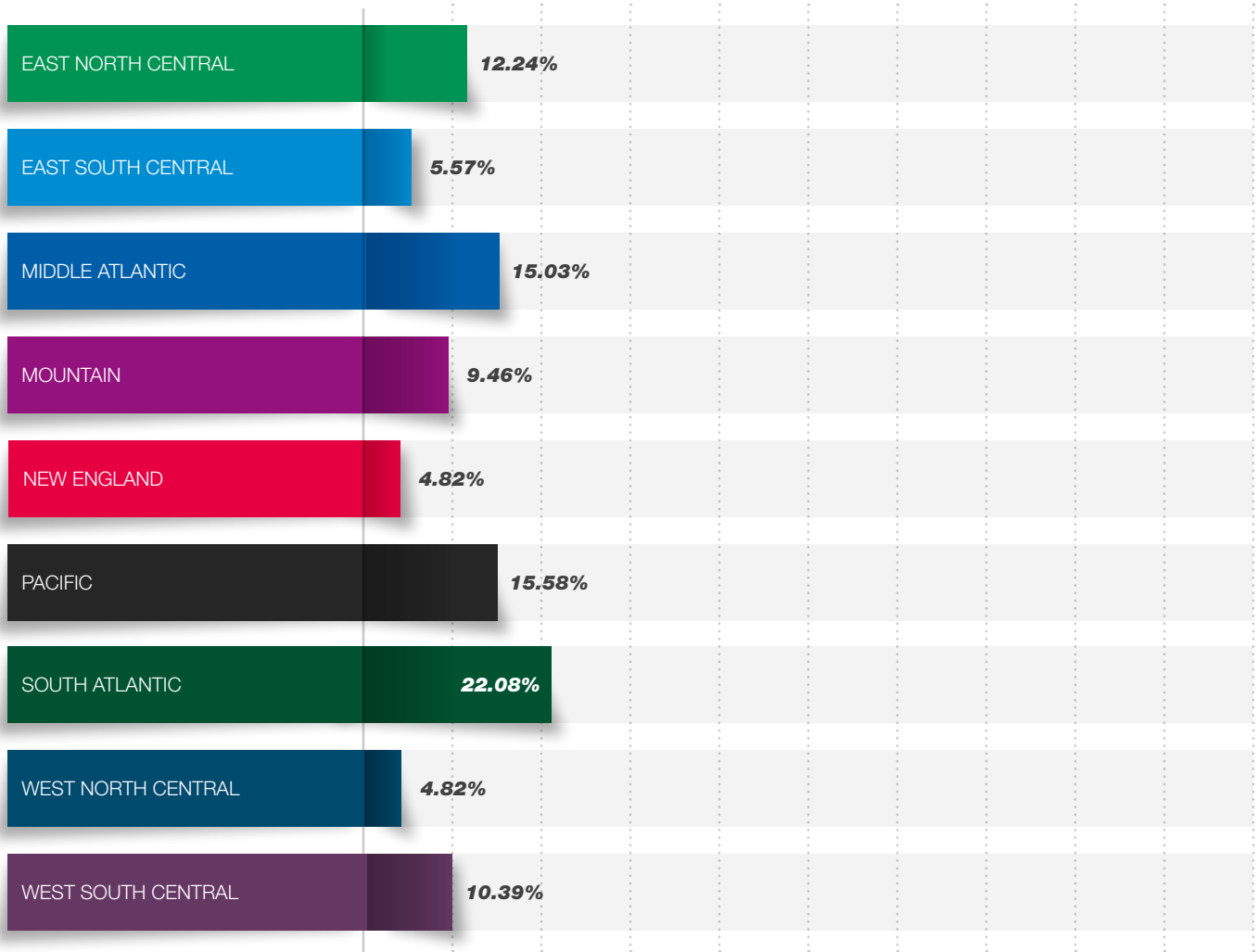
Household Income



Device Type



Region



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