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Attributes and Preferences of U.S. Vegetarians

Godfrey Ejimakor and Uche Onyeagu

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Recent incidents of mad-cow disease and the increased awareness of the relationship between diet and health is expected to increase the demand for vegetarian food products that may be perceived to be healthier. This implies that the market for vegetarian products could be expected to continue to grow. By some estimates the market for vegetarian foods was expected to grow to \$1.5 billion in 2002. This represents a substantial increase over the \$893 million recorded in 2000. In order to remain competitive in the vegetarian food market, food producers and processors would need an increased knowledge of vegetarians and their preferences. An enhanced understanding of vegetarians will help food marketers produce, promote, and distribute vegetarian products more effectively.

This study uses data from a national survey (Center for Urban Affairs and Community Services 2001) to develop some attributes and preferences of the average vegetarian in the United States. The data were collected through a mail survey of 4778 U.S. households and is part of a study titled "Food From Our Changing World: What Do You Think?" The survey was conducted between 2001 and 2002. The number of useable responses from the survey is 819, which represent a response rate of 17.1 percent.

One of the many food-preference-related questions is whether the respondent is a vegetarian. The two possible responses are either "yes" or "no." In addition to the attributes and state of residence of the respondents, the survey instrument also asked questions on food labels, perceptions of food quality, freshness of food, appropriateness of food-production methods, appropriateness of food-processing methods, humane treatment of animals, acceptance of biotechnology food products, and others. The responses to these questions range from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree."

Respondents will be categorized as vegetarians and non-vegetarians. The mean attributes of the groups will be estimated and tested for statistically significant differences. The mean preferences of the groups relative to their responses to questions on food-product attributes will also be summarized and compared. Multivariate models such as the logit model will be used to assess the attributes that are likely predictors of vegetarians.

References

- Center for Urban Affairs and Community Services. 2001. *Food From Our Changing World: What Do You Think?* North Carolina State University, Greensboro.
- S-276 Technical Committee. 1996. *Rural Restructuring: Causes and Consequences of Globalized Agricultural and Natural Resource Systems.*

Godfrey Ejimakor and Unche Onyeagu are associate professor and graduate student, respectively, in the Department of Agribusiness and Applied Economics and Agriscience Education at North Carolina A&T State University, Greensboro, NC.