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Impressions on food safety from the frontline

Agriculture Union CFIA Membership Study

February 2016

Prepared for the Agriculture Union



Methodology

- The survey was conducted in English and French among 580 members of the Agriculture Union who work for the Canadian Food Inspection Agency using an internet survey programmed and collected by Abacus Data.
- The survey was completed from February 12 to February 29, 2016.
- There are a total of 3,712 members of Agriculture Union who work at the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. The response rate for the survey was 15.6%.
- The margin of error for this study is 4.15%, 19 times out of 20.



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KEY FINDINGS



Key Findings

With the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) on the verge of overhauling its food safety inspection program, a new survey of its staff reveals widespread confusion and an absence of confidence about the changes and a workforce that expects its short-handed inspection operations will lead to a major food borne illness in the near future.

- More than half (55%) of respondents describe the current complement of inspectors in their immediate workplace as inadequate to ensure compliance with food safety requirements. Four-in-ten (39%) report adequate and 6% report more than adequate complements.
- This shortage is most acute in meat plants where seven-in-ten (71%) inspectors in process meat plants and 60% in slaughter facilities report staffing levels in their immediate work team that are inadequate to ensure safety compliance.
- Daily presence of inspection staff in meat processing plants, a safety requirement for establishments producing for both Canadian and foreign consumer, is a reality for only a small minority (27%) working in the meat hygiene program who report there are enough staff for this practice to always be in place. More than half (57%) report sufficient staff to provide daily presence sometimes, while 13% report it rarely happens and 4% say it never happens.
- Nearly seven in ten (69%) respondents believe that a major food borne illness outbreak is likely in the near future given the state of food safety in Canada today. Just 15% believe that such an outbreak is unlikely.

Key Findings

- One-in-four (24%) of all respondents have been asked by a CFIA manager to stop doing required food safety related tasks and most (59%) believe these instructions have been issued because there are not enough inspectors available to do all required food safety tasks.
- A wide majority (86%) believe greater reliance on the food industry to police its own food safety practices makes Canada's food supply less safe.
- Concerning Inspection Modernization, CFIA's staff lack confidence in the program's ability to protect consumer safety, do not feel they have been briefed on their new roles, or trained on their new responsibilities, and expect it will limit hands-on oversight.
- A majority feel not at all (42%) or not very (24%) qualified because the CFIA's Modernization program expects inspectors to work outside their area of expertise and half (50%) believe the new approach will actually increase the chance of a major food borne illness outbreak.
- Half (50%) of all respondents doubt the CFIA's senior leadership will be able to introduce Inspection Modernization while protecting public safety at the same time. Only 14% agree the CFIA's senior leadership will be able to safeguard the public during the transition.



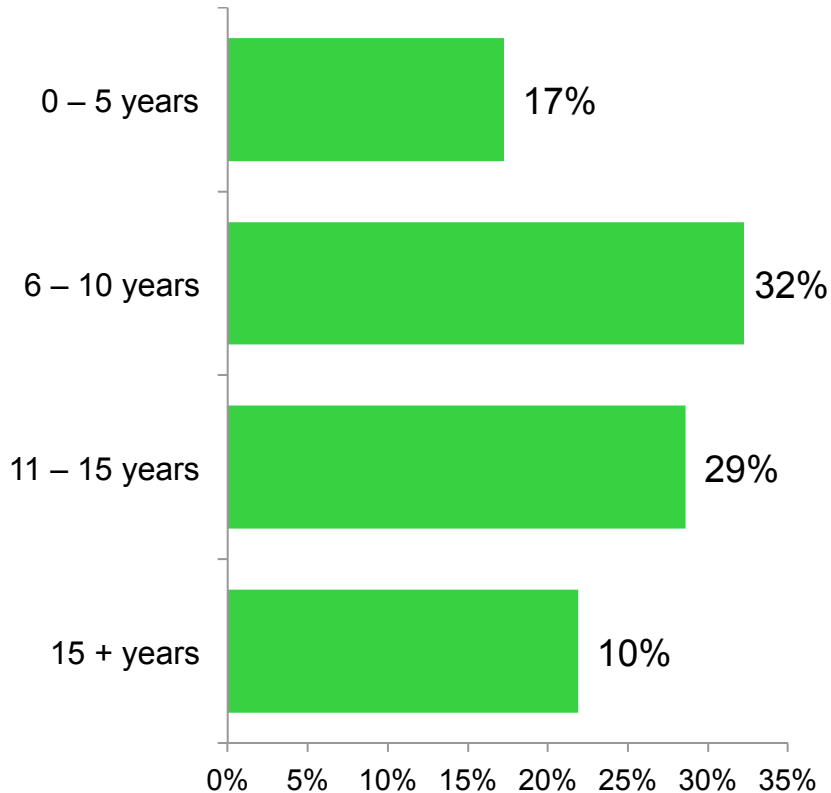
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PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

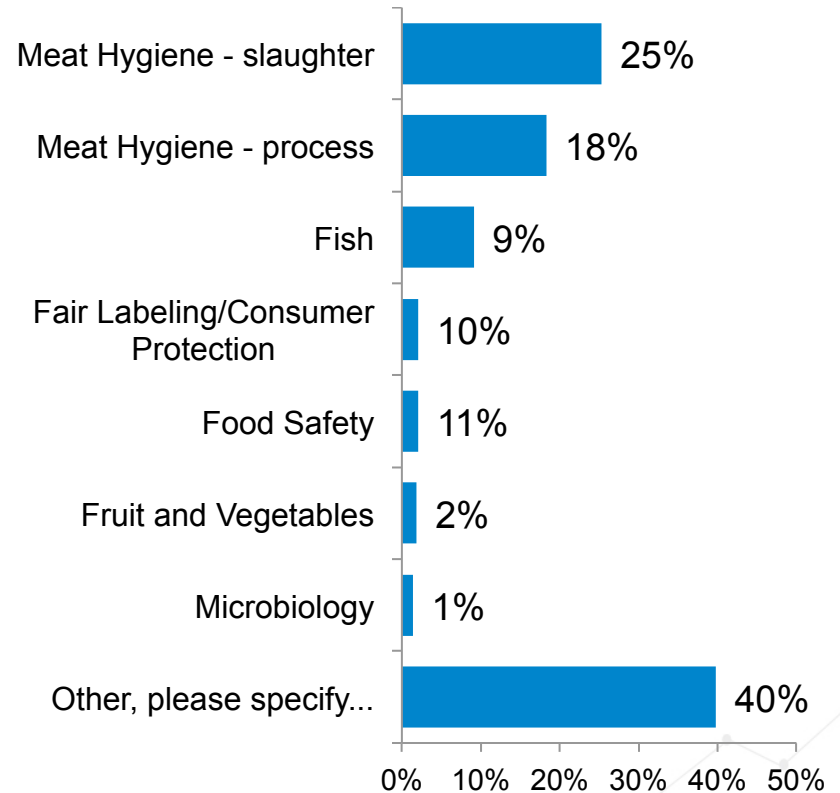


Profile of Respondents

Length of time at CFIA



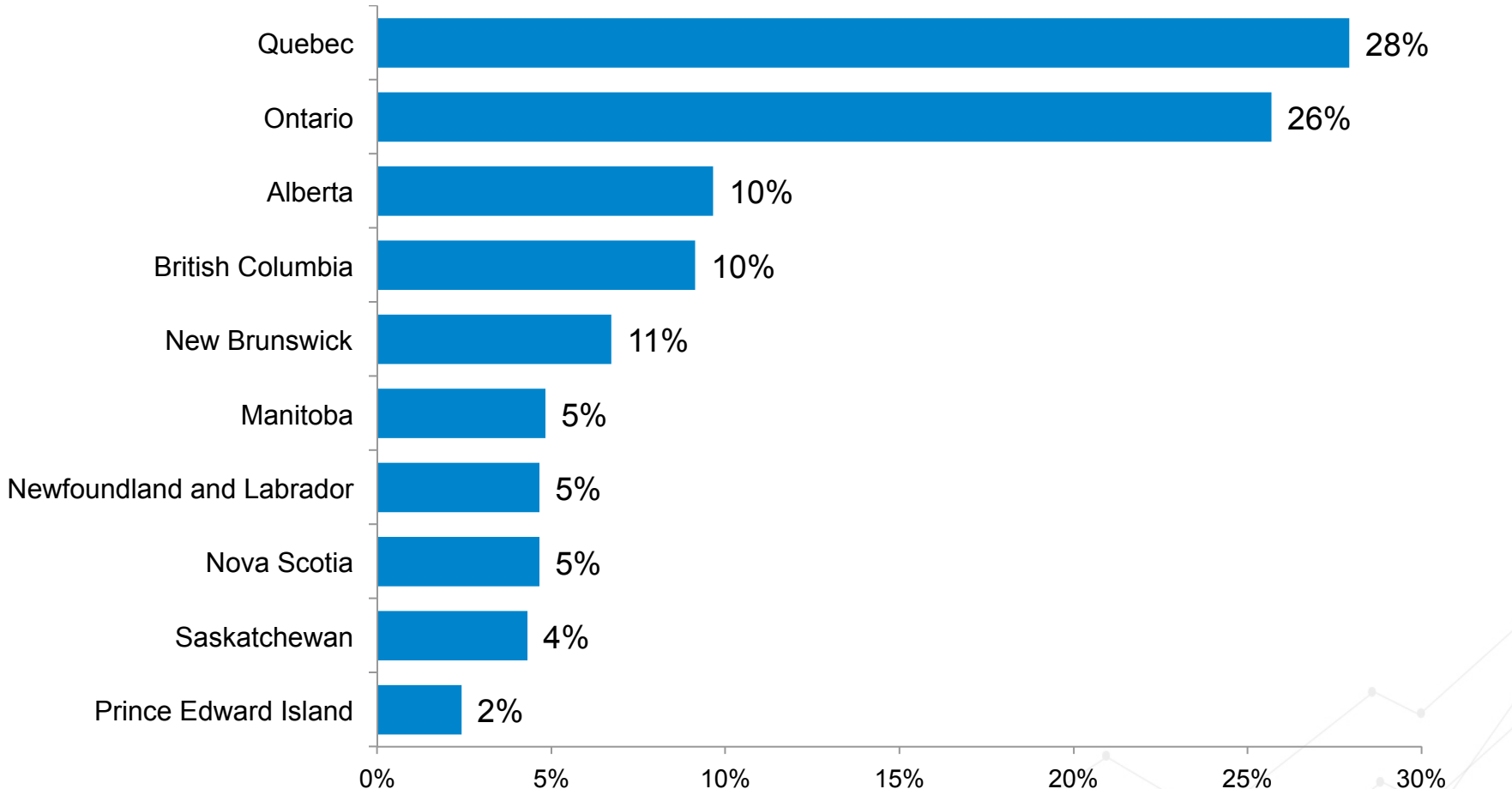
Program at CFIA



The majority of respondents have 6 to 15 years of experience, with the plurality of respondents working in the meat hygiene program area.

Province of Employment

In which province do you work?





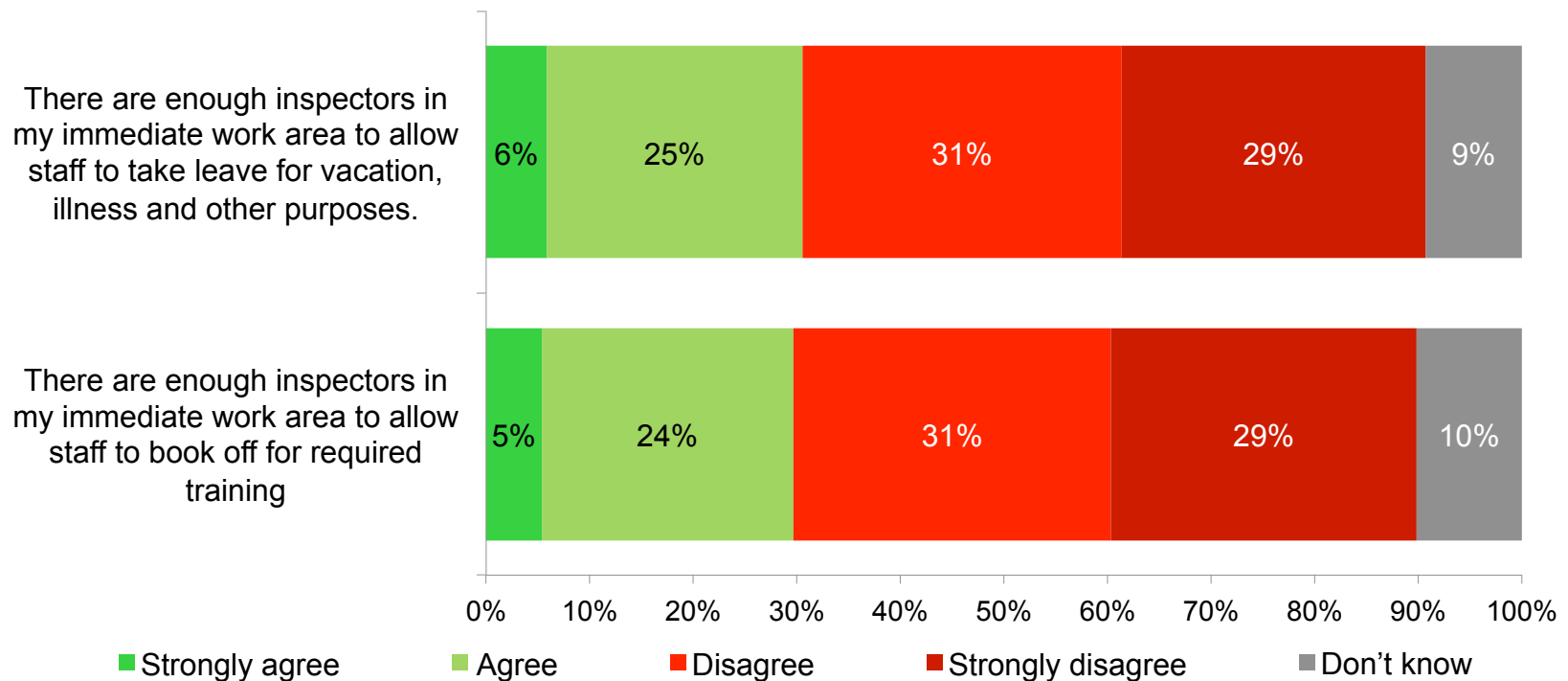
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SURVEY FINDINGS



Number of inspectors in local workplaces

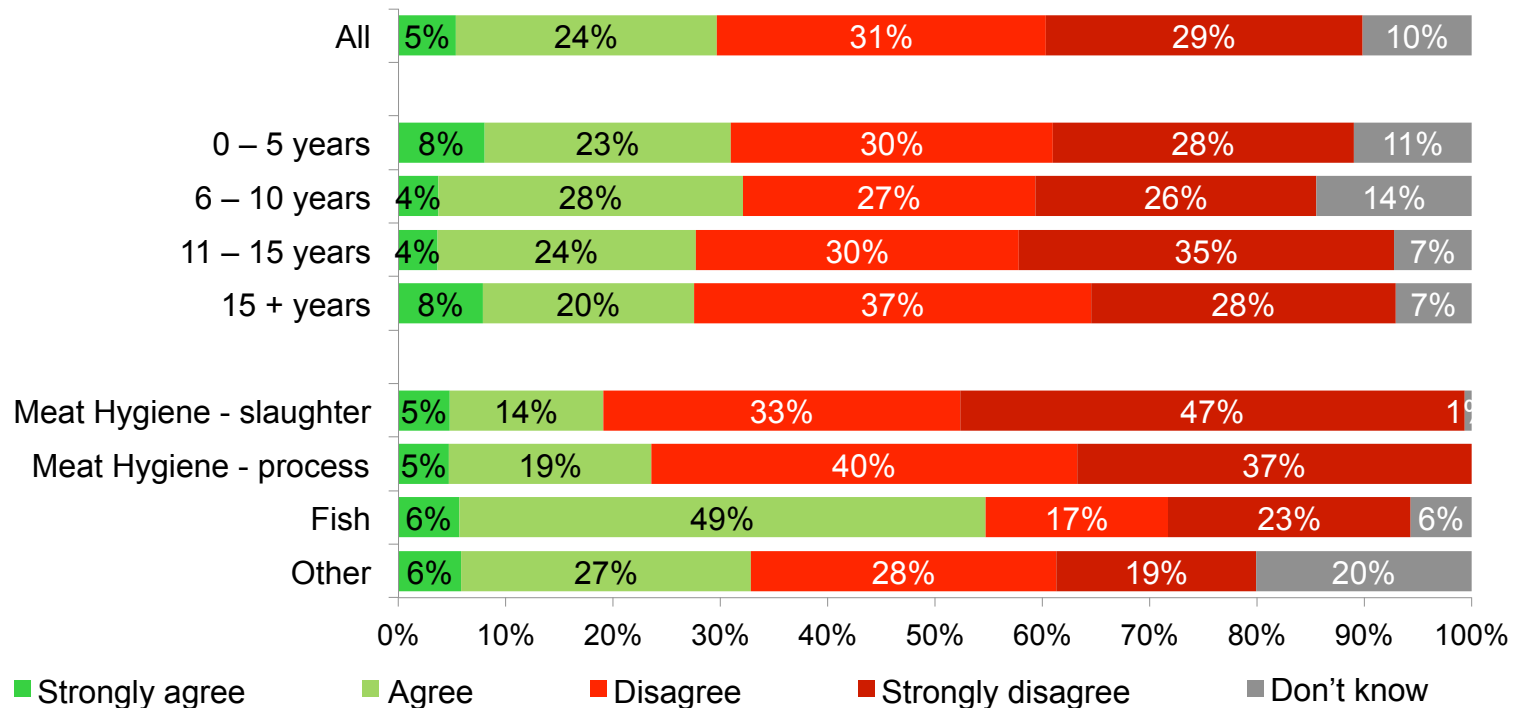
Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?



Overall, a majority (60%) of respondents agree there are insufficient inspectors in their work area to allow staff to take leave for vacation, illness or other reasons, or to allow staff to book off time for required training.

Number of inspectors in local workplaces

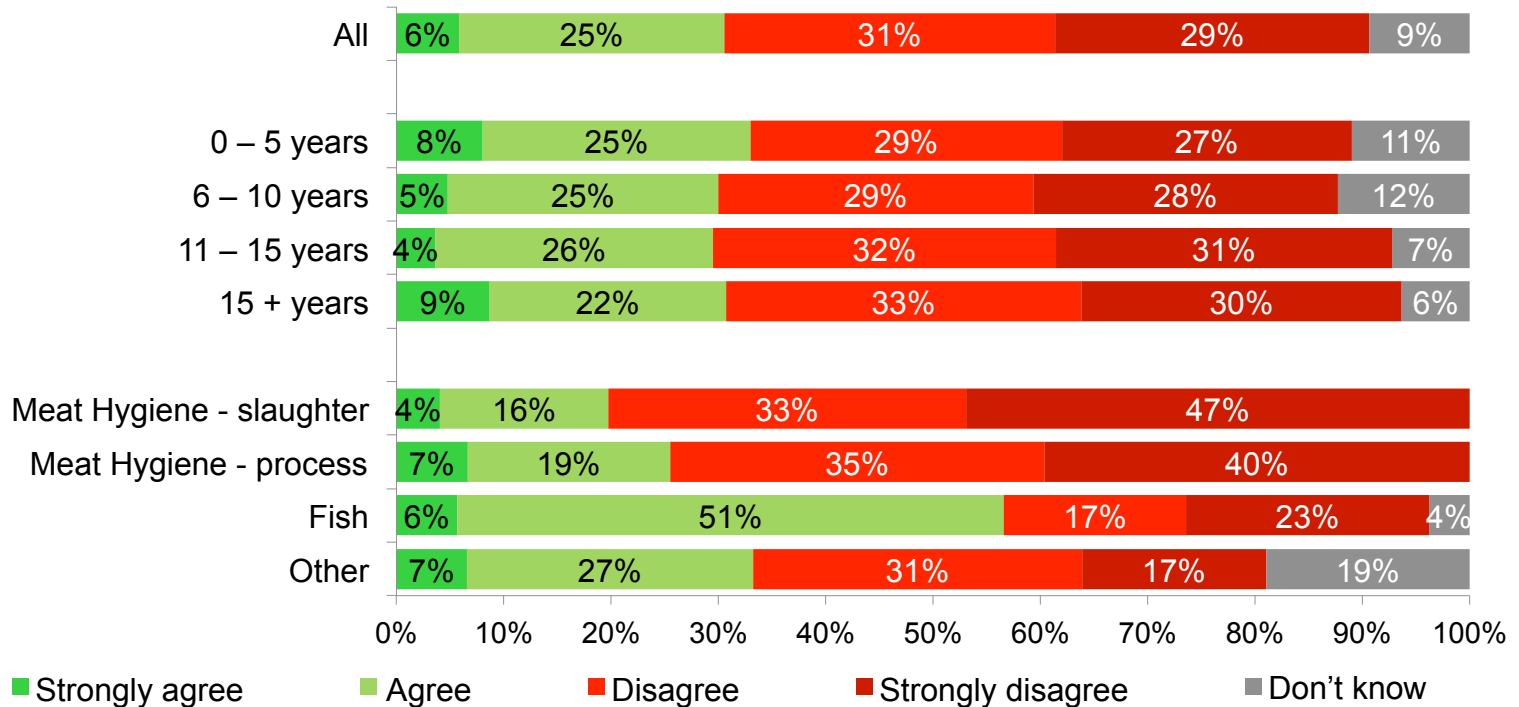
Do you agree or disagree with the following statements? | There are enough inspectors in my immediate work area to allow staff to book off for required training



When asked whether there are sufficient inspectors in their work area to allow time off for required training, 60% of all respondents report there are not. Inspectors in meat slaughter (80% disagree) and processing (77% disagree) establishments were least likely to report sufficient inspectors, while those working in fish were most likely to feel there were enough inspectors (55% agree).

Number of inspectors in local workplaces

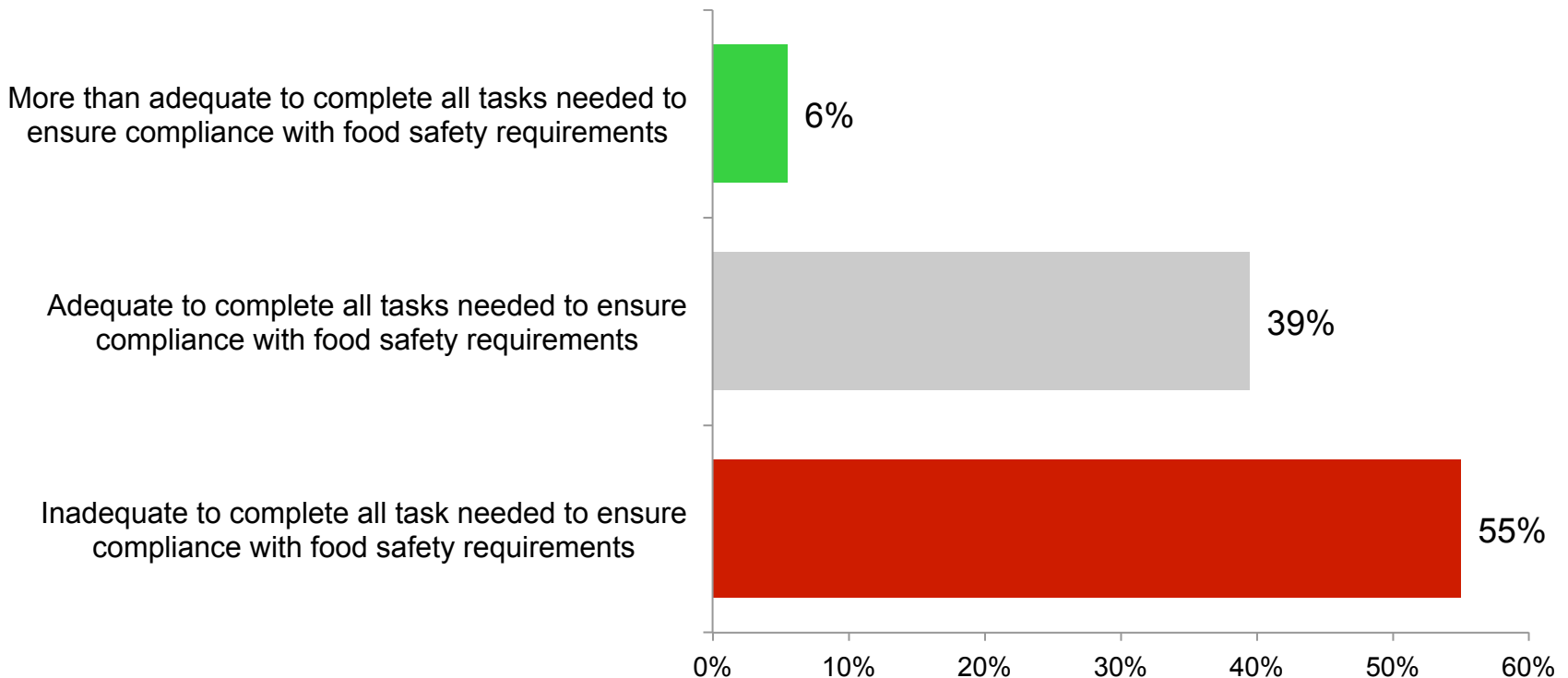
Do you agree or disagree with the following statements? | There are enough inspectors in my immediate work area to allow staff to take leave for vacation, illness and other purposes.



When asked whether there are sufficient inspectors in their work area to allow time off for vacation, illness, or other leave, 60% of respondents felt there are not. Again, those working in the meat slaughter (80% disagree) and meat process (75% disagree) were least likely to feel there are sufficient inspectors, while those working in fish were most likely to feel there are enough inspectors (57% agree).

Perceptions about Current Complement of Inspection Staff

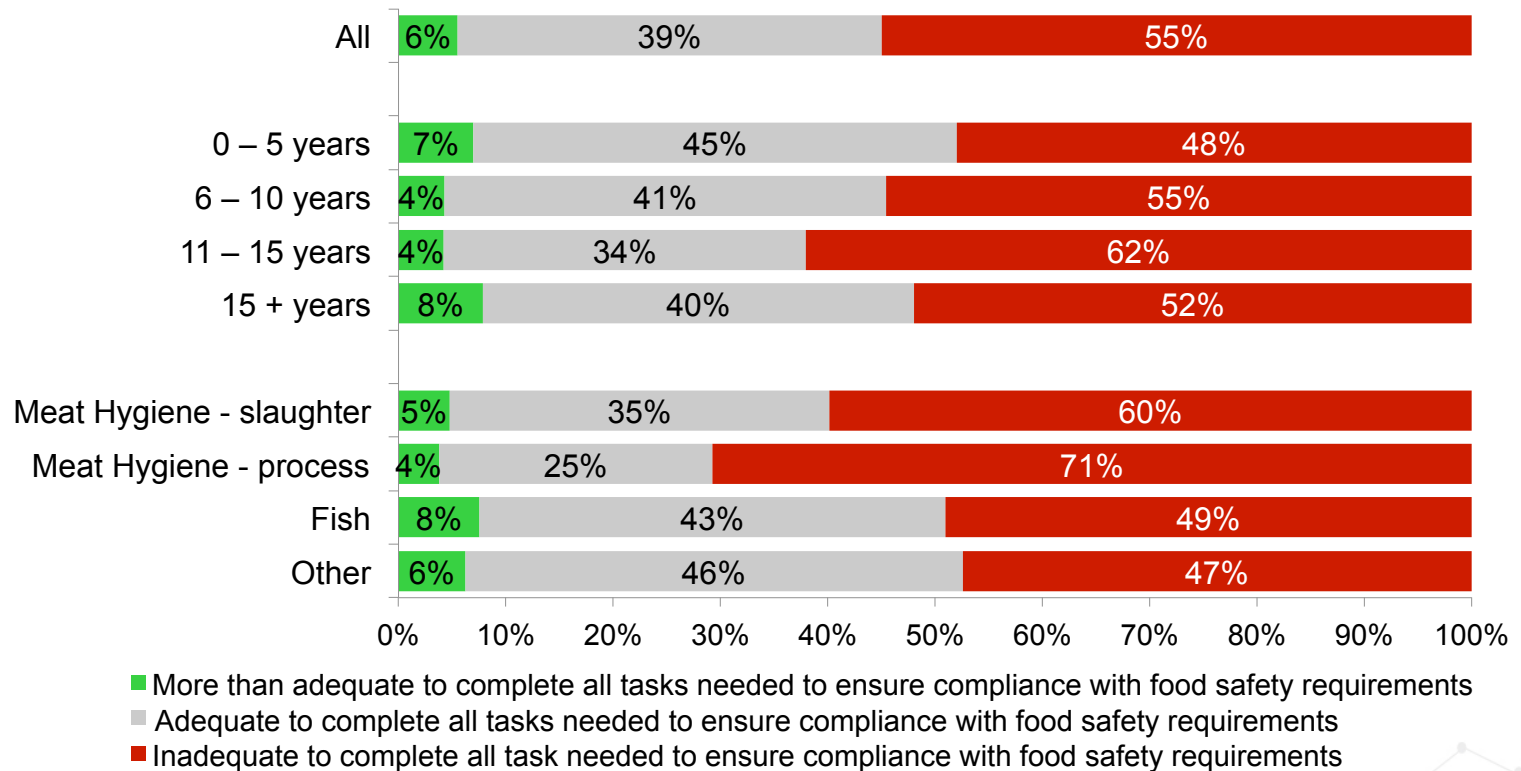
Which of the following best describes the current complement of inspection staff in your immediate working group?



Although 39% of respondents report that the current complement of staff in their immediate working group is adequate to ensure compliance with food safety requirements, a majority (55%) felt that current staffing levels are inadequate.

Perceptions about Current Complement of Inspection Staff

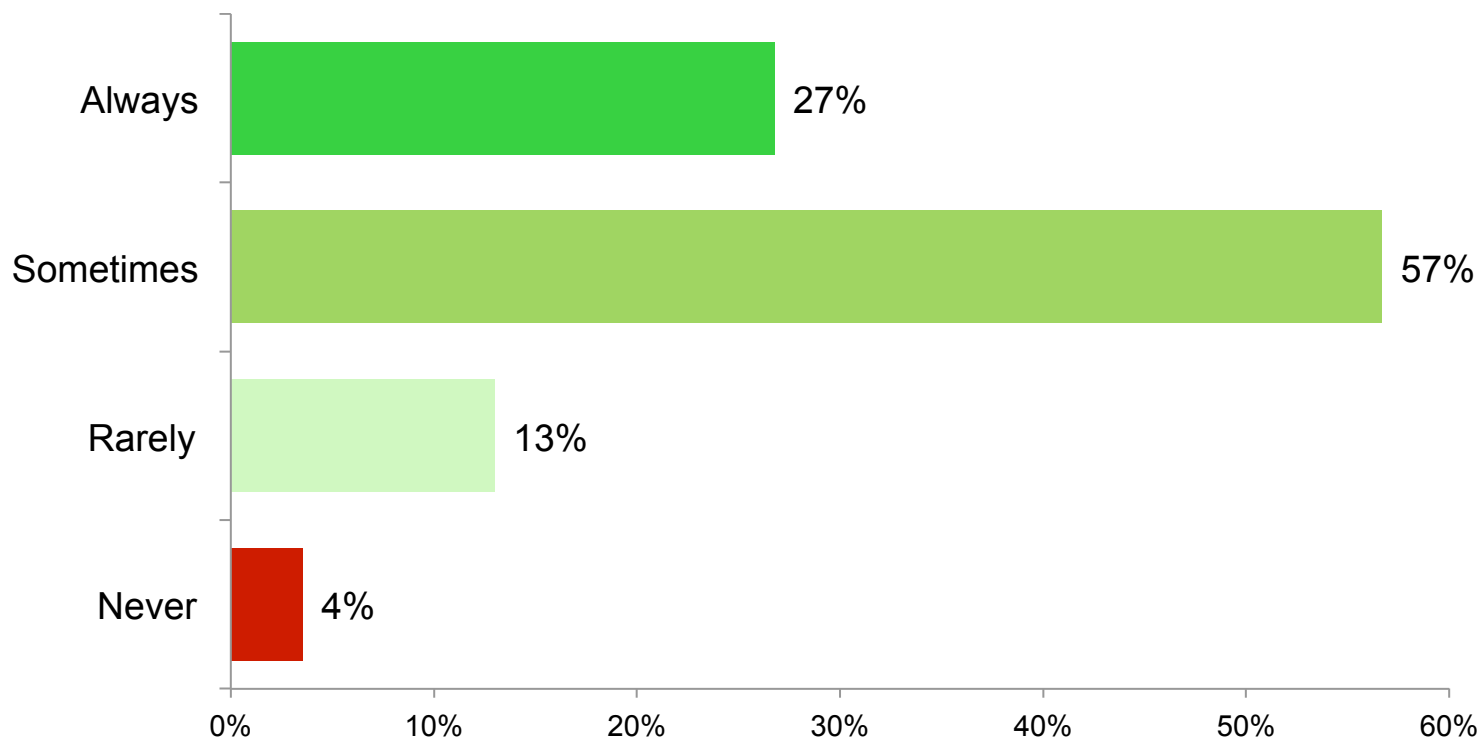
Which of the following best describes the current complement of inspection staff in your immediate working group?



Overall, 55% of respondents felt the current complement of inspection staff in their working group was inadequate. This view was more widely held among those with 11-15 years of experience (62%), and those working in the meat hygiene – process area (71%).

Daily Presence of Meat Inspectors

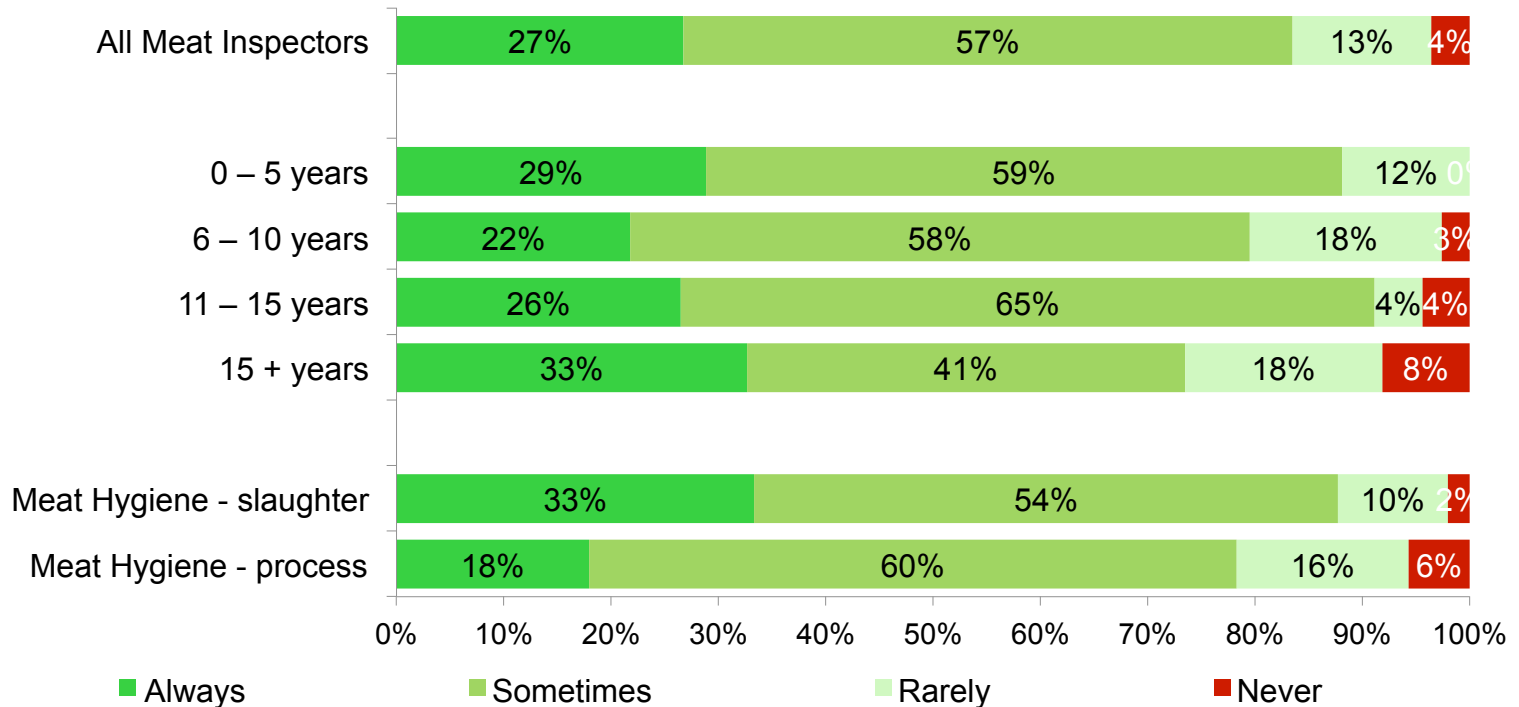
Are there enough inspectors in your immediate working group to allow meaningful daily presence in establishments for which your group is responsible? **Meat Inspectors Only**



Just over a quarter of meat inspectors (27%) report that there are always enough inspectors in their group to allow for meaningful daily presence in meat slaughter and process establishments they are responsible for. Meanwhile, a majority (57%) report that there are sometimes enough, while 13% report there are rarely enough and 4% report there are never enough to meet this requirement.

Daily Presence of Meat Inspectors

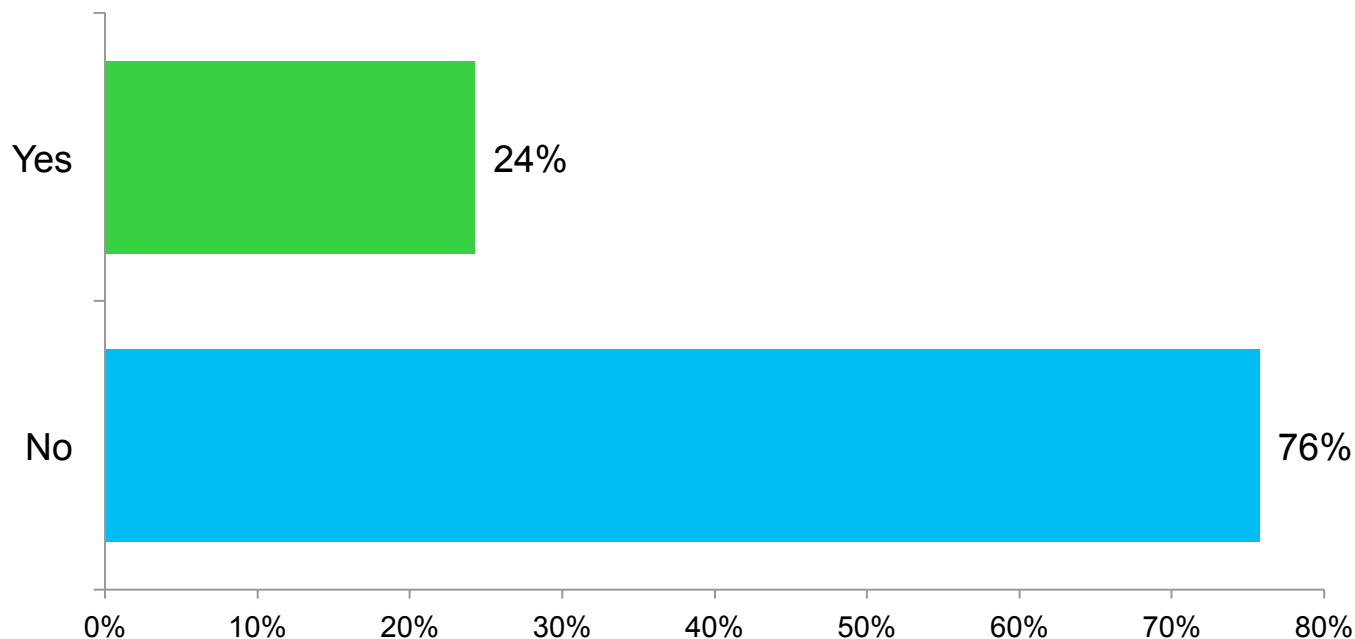
Are there enough inspectors in your immediate working group to allow meaningful daily presence in establishments for which your group is responsible? **Meat Inspectors Only**



When examined across demographic subgroups, those with 6-10 years of experience (22%), and those working in meat hygiene processing (18%) were least likely to think there are always enough inspectors to allow meaningful daily presence.

Required Food Safety Tasks

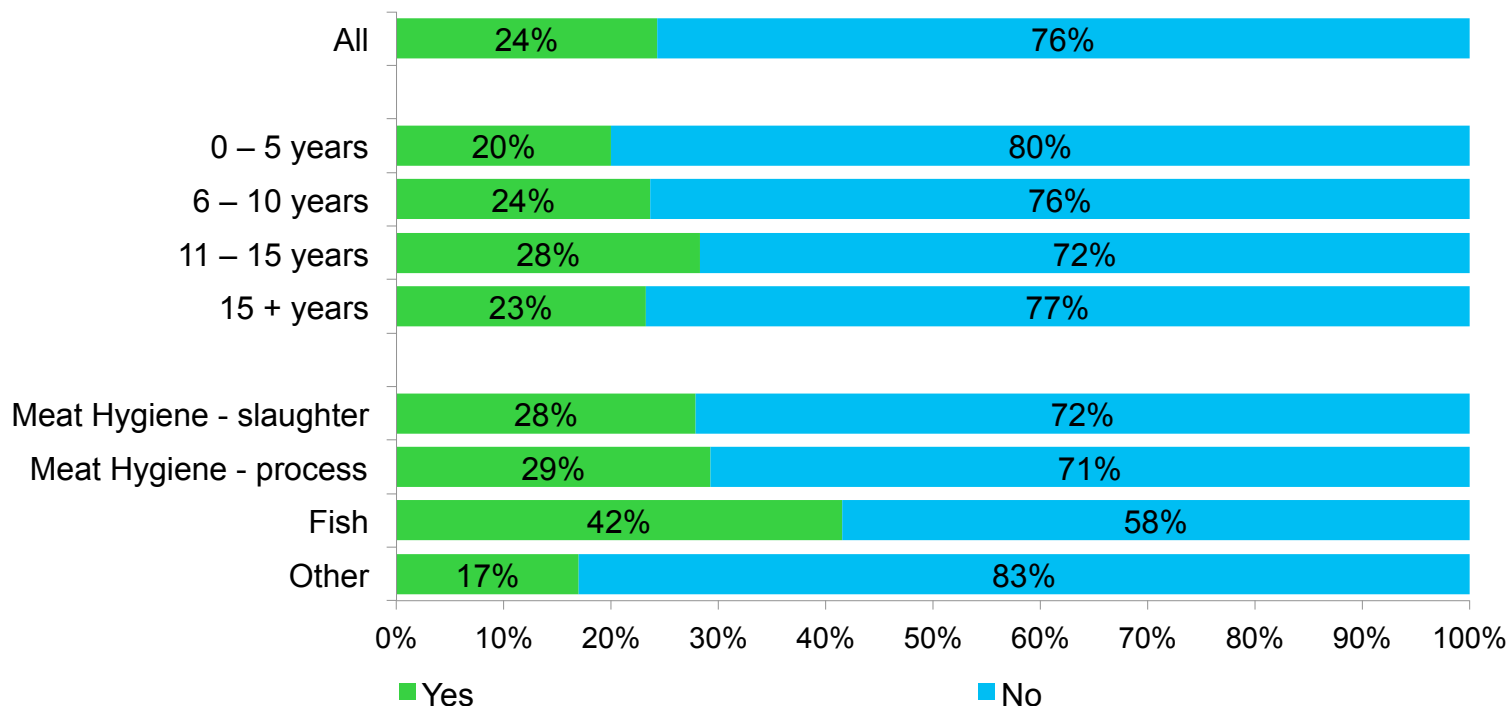
Have you been asked or directed by CFIA managers to stop doing some required food safety related tasks?



Although 76% of respondents answered 'no', nearly a quarter (24%) stated that they had been asked or directed by CFIA managers to stop doing some required food safety related tasks.

Required Food Safety Related Tasks

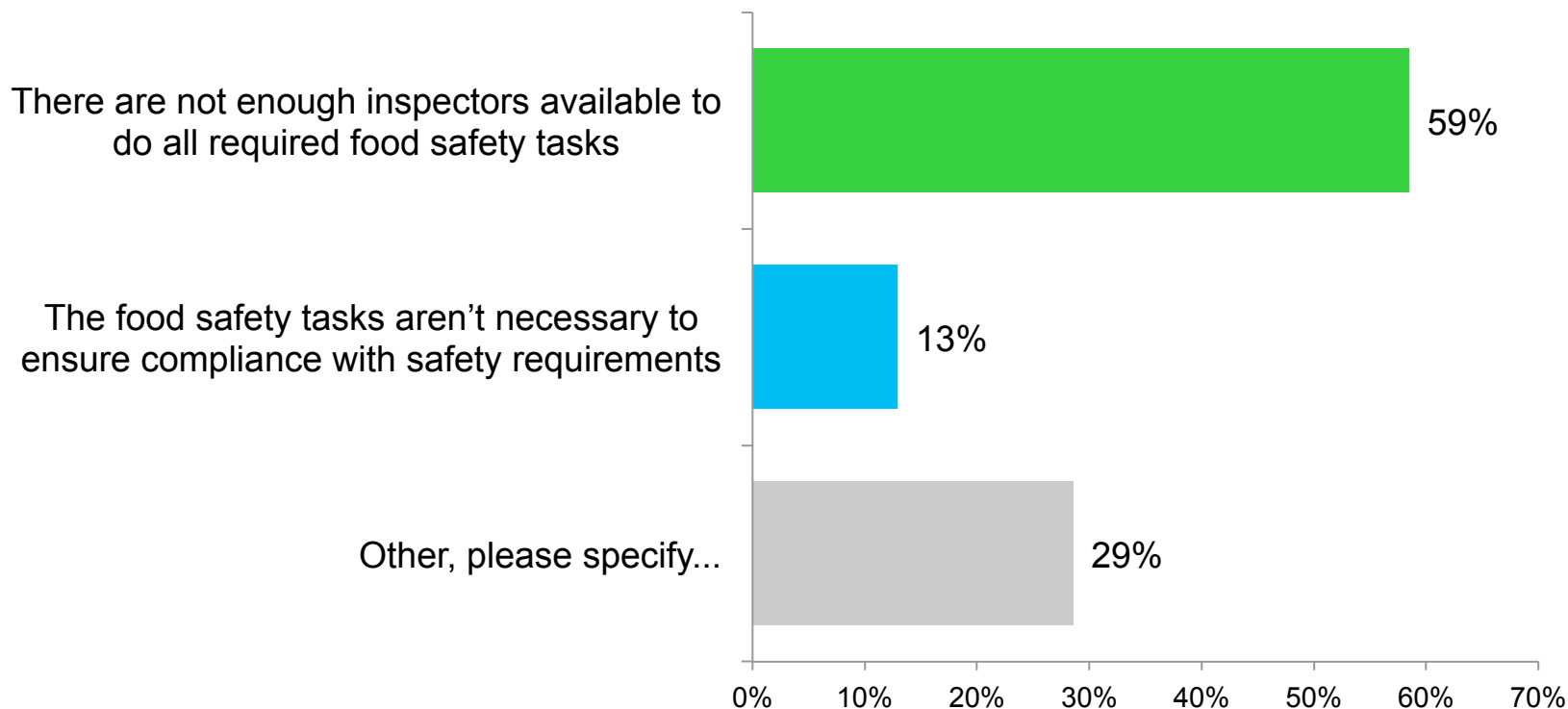
Have you been asked or directed by CFIA managers to stop doing some required food safety related tasks?



While those with five years experience or less (20%), and those working in other sectors (17%) were least likely to have been asked to stop doing some food safety related tasks, those in fish (42%) and meat hygiene process (29%) were most likely.

Reason for stopping food safety related tasks

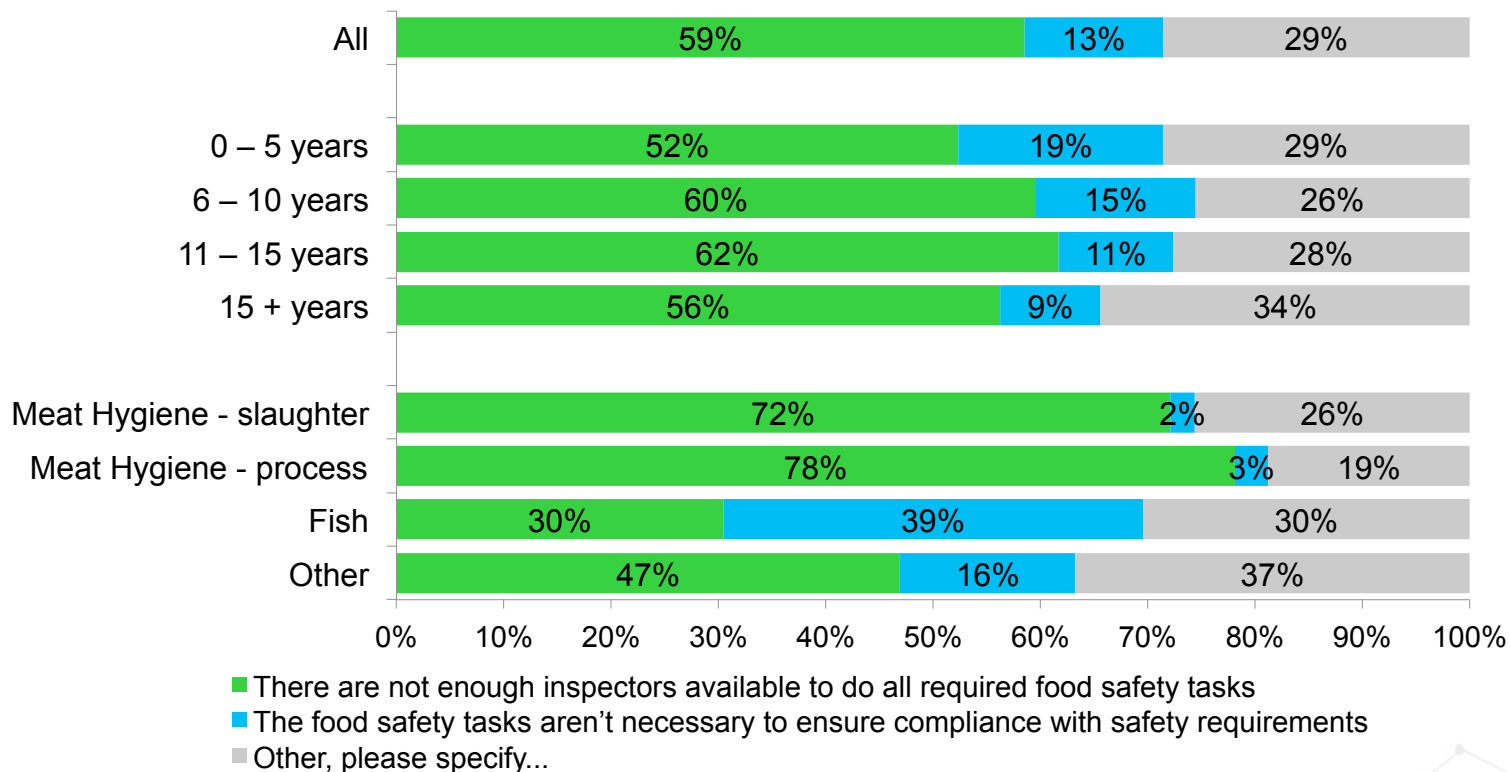
Which of the following best describes why managers at the CFIA asked you to stop doing some required food safety related tasks, in your opinion?



Of those asked to stop doing some required food safety related tasks, a majority (59%) believe that such a request was made because of a lack of available inspectors. Just 13% felt the request was made because the tasks were not necessary to ensure compliance with safety requirements.

Reason for stopping food safety related tasks.

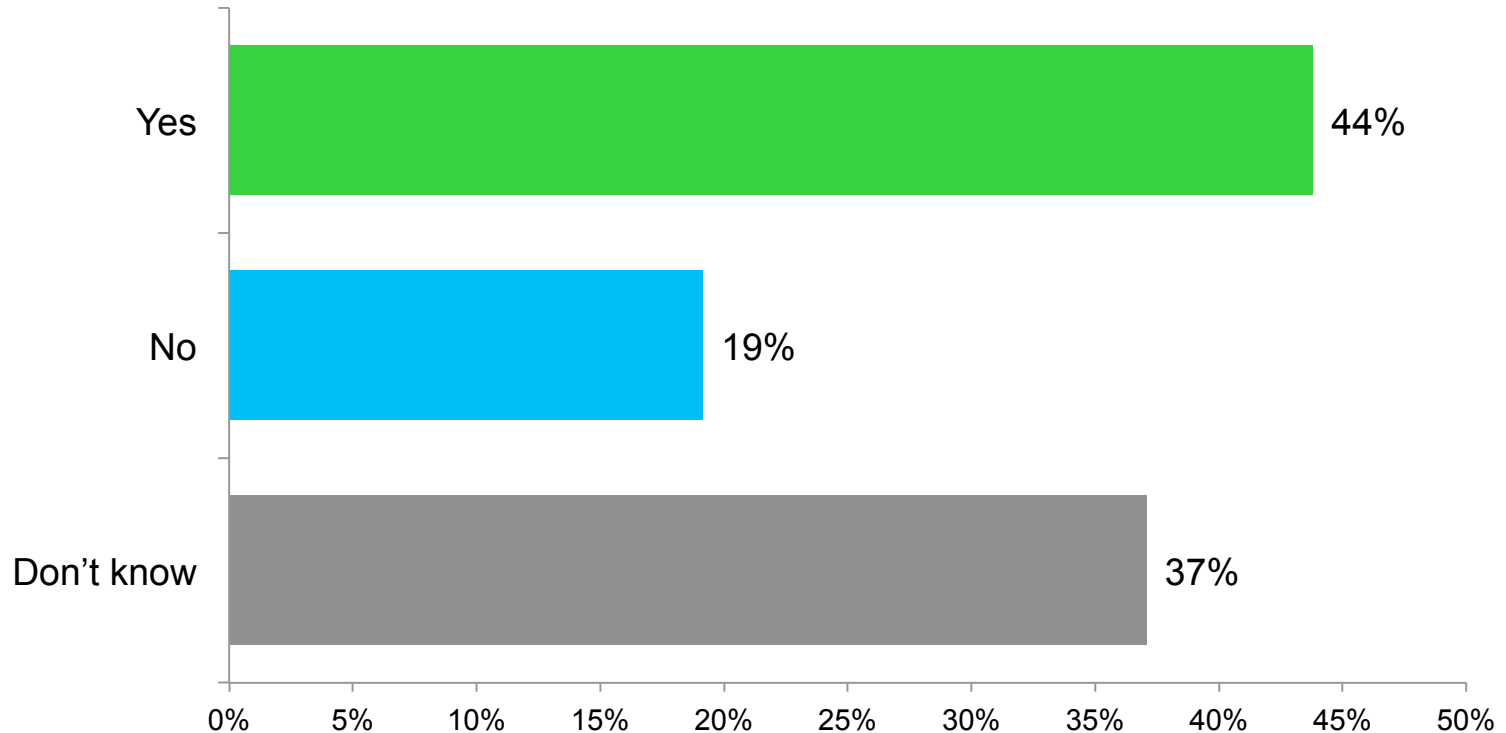
Which of the following best describes why managers at the CFIA asked you to stop doing some required food safety related tasks, in your opinion?



Across demographic subgroups, those working in the meat hygiene slaughter and process divisions were more likely to feel that they were asked to stop doing some tasks because there are not enough inspectors (72% and 78%, respectively). Those in the fish sector were most likely to feel that they were asked to stop because the tasks were not necessary (39%).

Increased Risk of Food Borne Illness

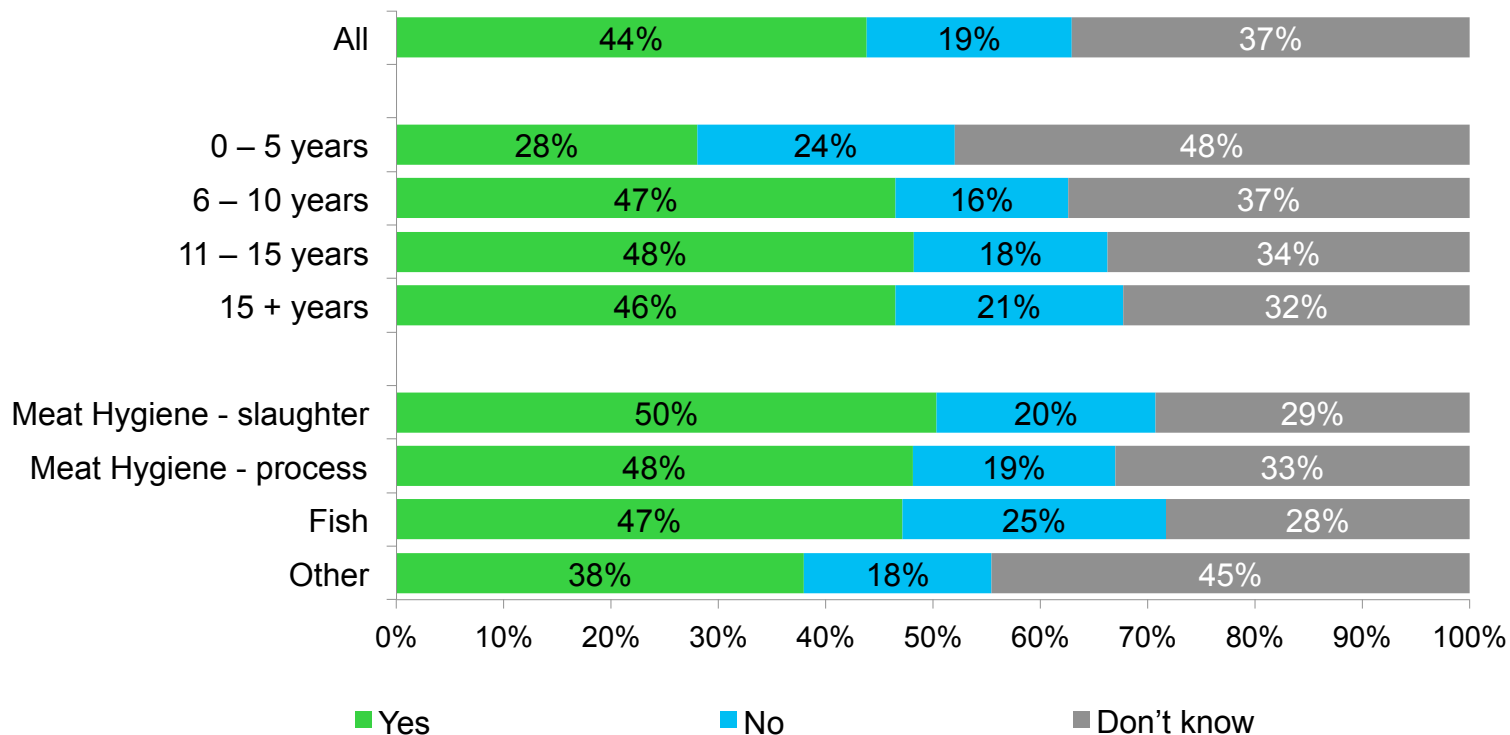
In your opinion, have Canadian consumers been exposed to an increased risk of food borne illness because of a shortage of inspectors?



Although 37% of respondents weren't sure if a shortage of food inspectors has led to an increased risk of food borne illness, a plurality (44%) believe it has.

Increased Risk of Food Borne Illness

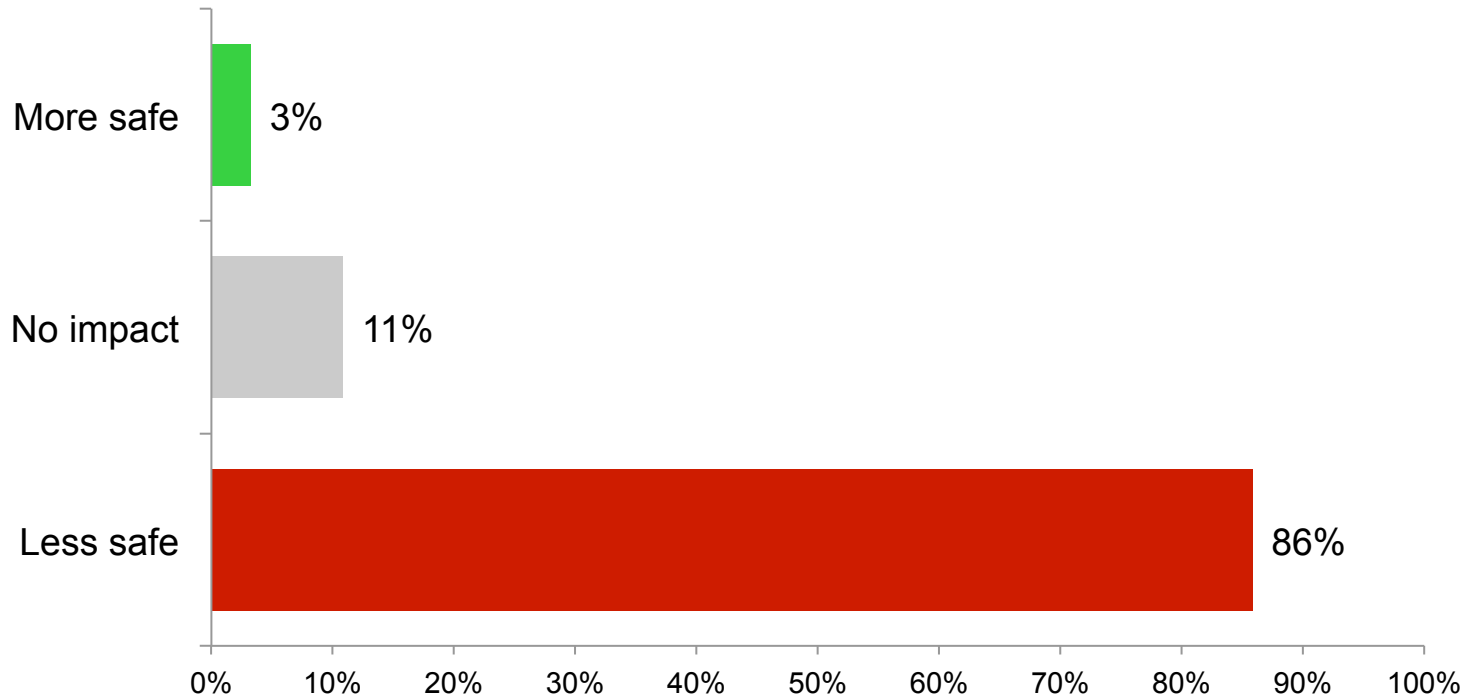
In your opinion, have Canadian consumers been exposed to an increased risk of food borne illness because of a shortage of inspectors?



Although there was minimal variation across demographic subgroups when it came to an increased risk of food borne illness in Canada as a result of a shortage of inspectors, those who have worked for CFIA for five years or less were less likely to see a relationship between risk and the number of inspectors (28%).

Self Regulation

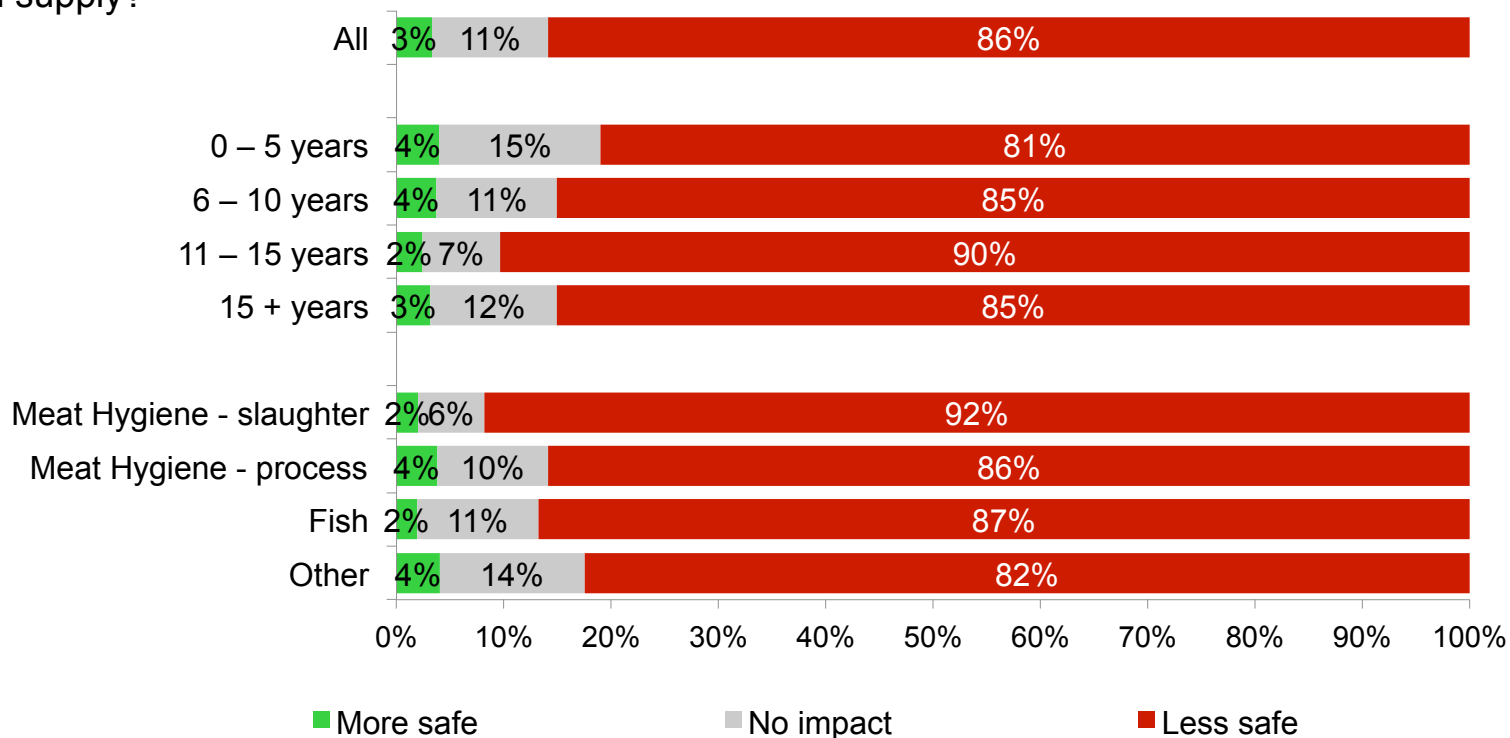
As you may know, the CFIA is increasingly reliant on industry to self-regulate when it comes to food safety. Will this trend make Canada's food supply more safe, less safe, or will it have no impact on the food supply?



Overall, a strong majority (86%) of respondents believe that a greater reliance on industry to self-regulate food safety makes Canada's food supply less safe.

Self Regulation

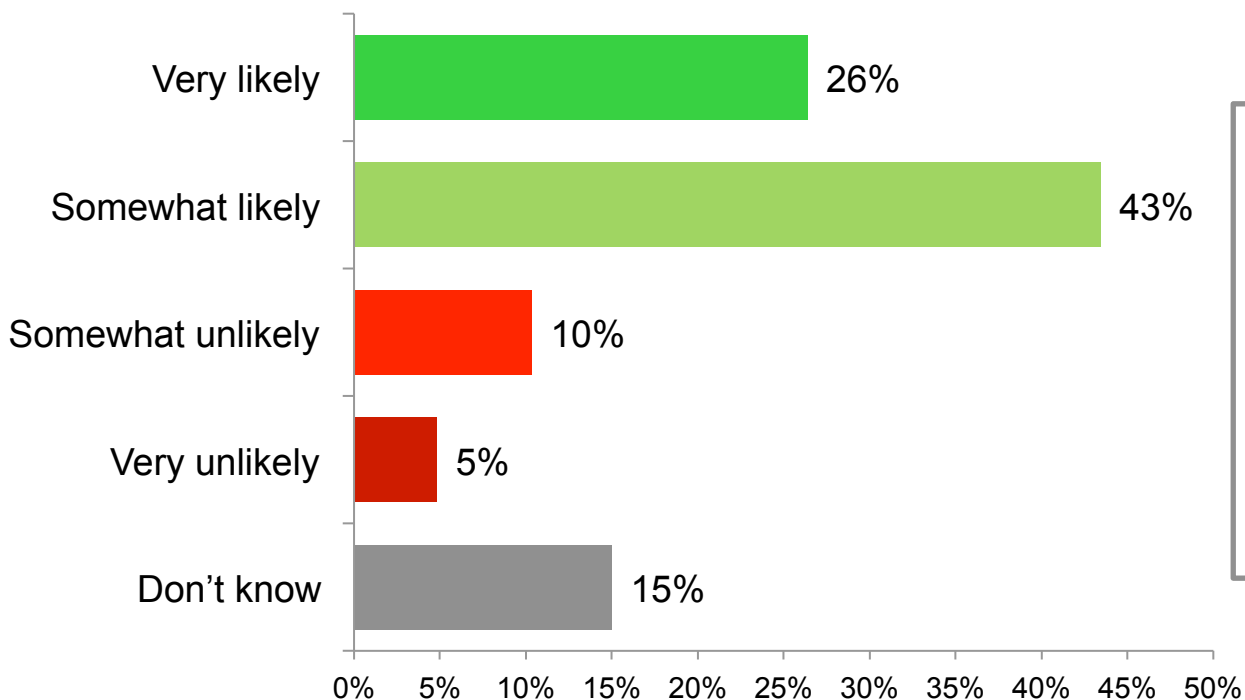
As you may know, the CFIA is increasingly reliant on industry to self-regulate when it comes to food safety. Will this trend make Canada's food supply more safe, less safe, or will it have no impact on the food supply?



Results are relatively consistent across demographic subgroups when respondents were asked whether an increased reliance on industry to self-regulate would lead to a safer or less safe food supply in Canada.

Likelihood of Major Food Borne Illness

Given your knowledge and experience with the state of food inspection in Canada, what is the likelihood that a major food borne illness outbreak in Canada will occur in the near future?

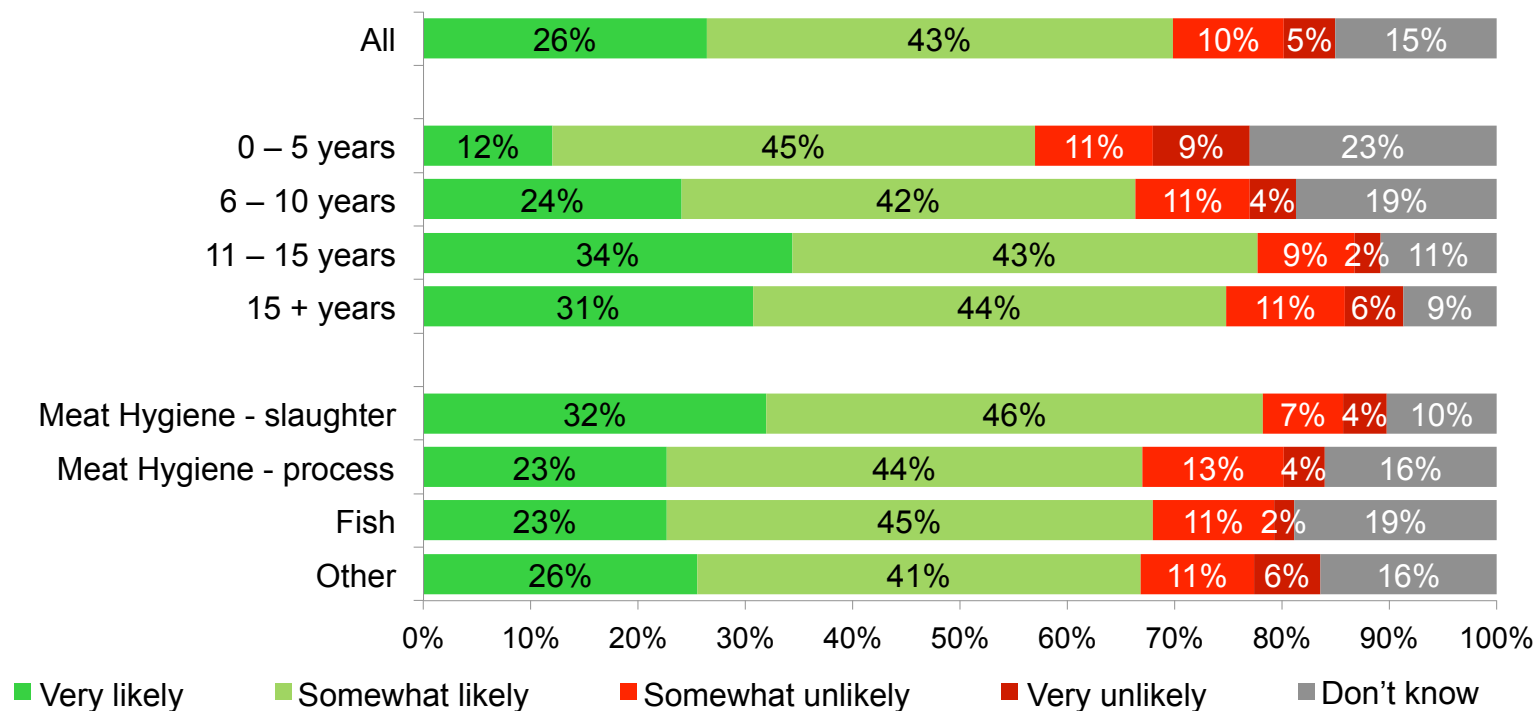


69% believe that a major food borne illness outbreak in Canada is at least somewhat likely to occur in the near future.

Nearly seven in ten (69%) respondents believe that, based on their knowledge and experience, a major food borne illness outbreak in Canada is likely in the near future. Just 15% felt that such an outbreak is unlikely.

Likelihood of Major Food Borne Illness

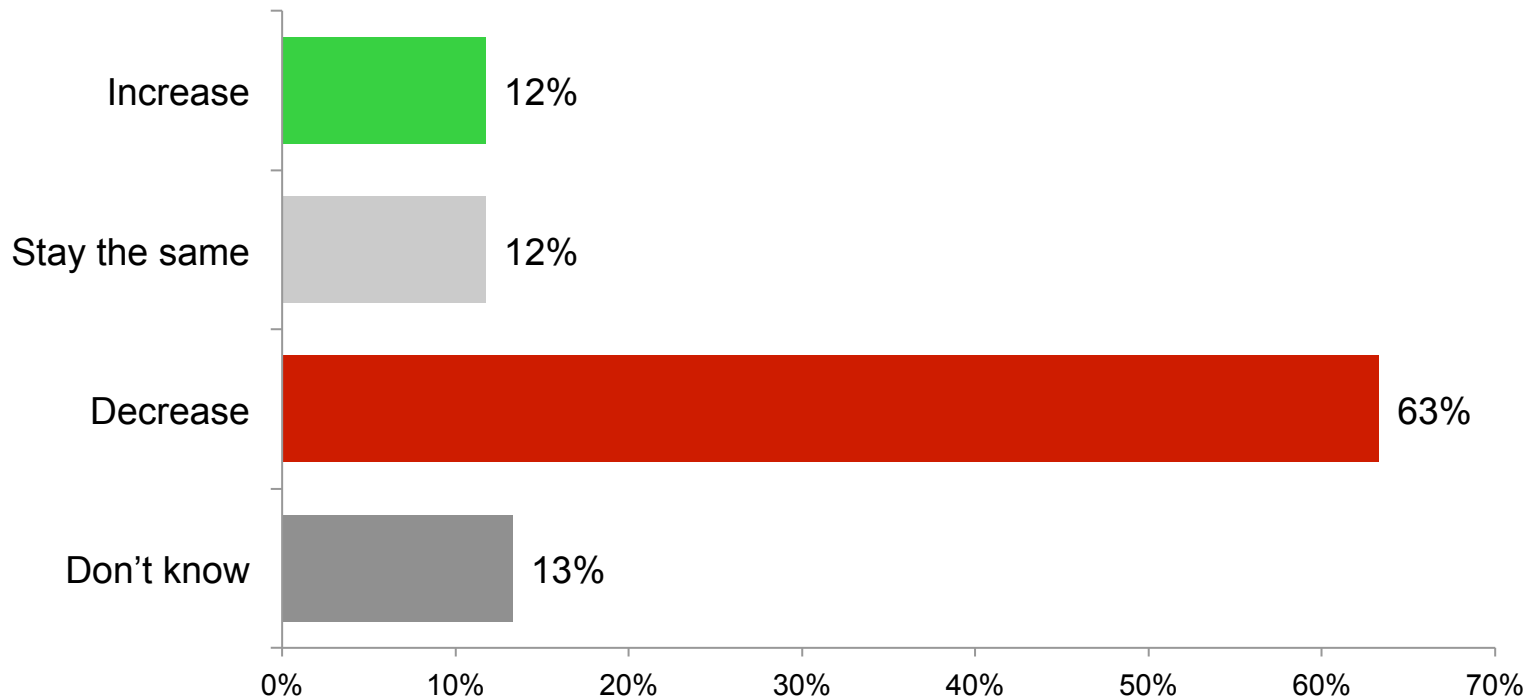
Given your knowledge and experience with the state of food inspection in Canada, what is the likelihood that a major food borne illness outbreak in Canada will occur in the near future?



Across demographic subgroups, belief in the likelihood of a major food borne illness outbreak in Canada in the near future is most widely held by those working in meat hygiene – slaughter (78% likely) and those with over 11 years of experience (77% likely). This belief was least held by those with less than five years of experience (57% likely).

What if Canadian consumers knew what you know?

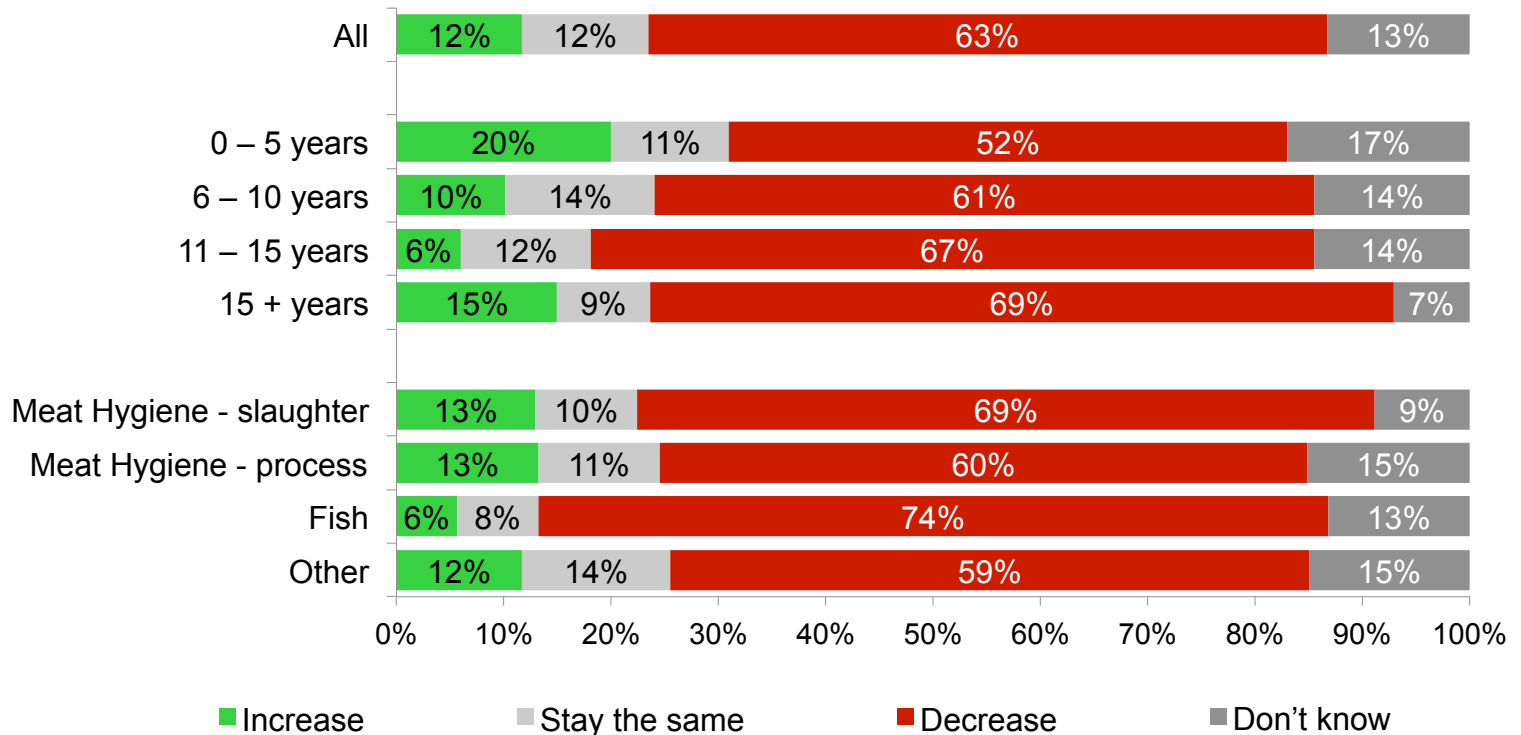
If Canadian consumers had your knowledge about the level of food inspection in Canada today, do you think their level of confidence in the safety of food they consume would...



A strong majority of respondents (63%) think confidence in food inspection would decrease if Canadians had their inside knowledge. Few (12%) believe more knowledge would increase confidence among Canadians, and another 12% felt more knowledge would make no difference.

What if Canadian consumers knew what you know?

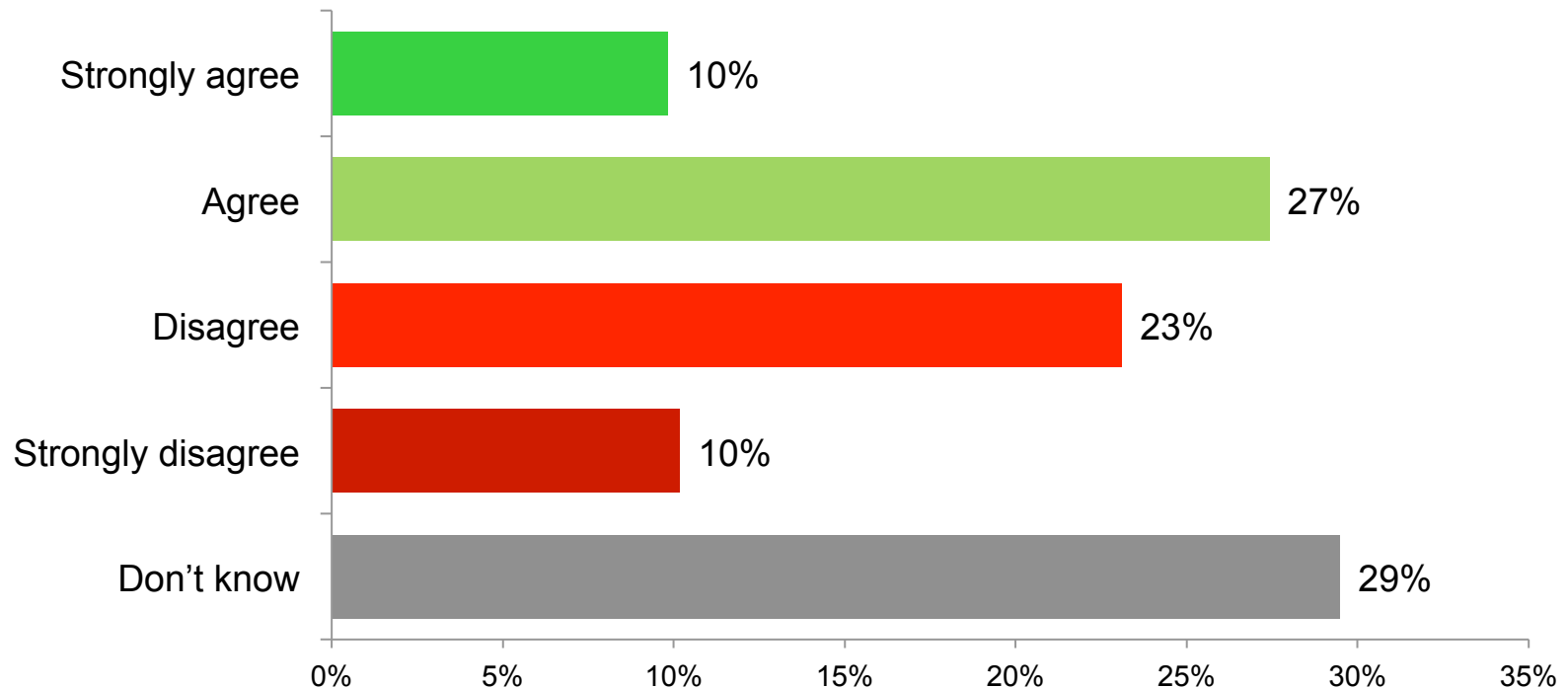
If Canadian consumers had your knowledge about the level of food inspection in Canada today, do you think their level of confidence in the safety of food they consume would...



Across demographic subgroups, those with more experience working for CFIA were more likely to believe that public confidence would decrease if consumers shared workers' knowledge. Those with less than five years of experience were most likely to feel that public confidence would increase (20%). Those working in areas of meat hygiene – slaughter and fish were most likely to feel that confidence would decrease, at 69% and 74%, respectively.

The Compliance Verification System

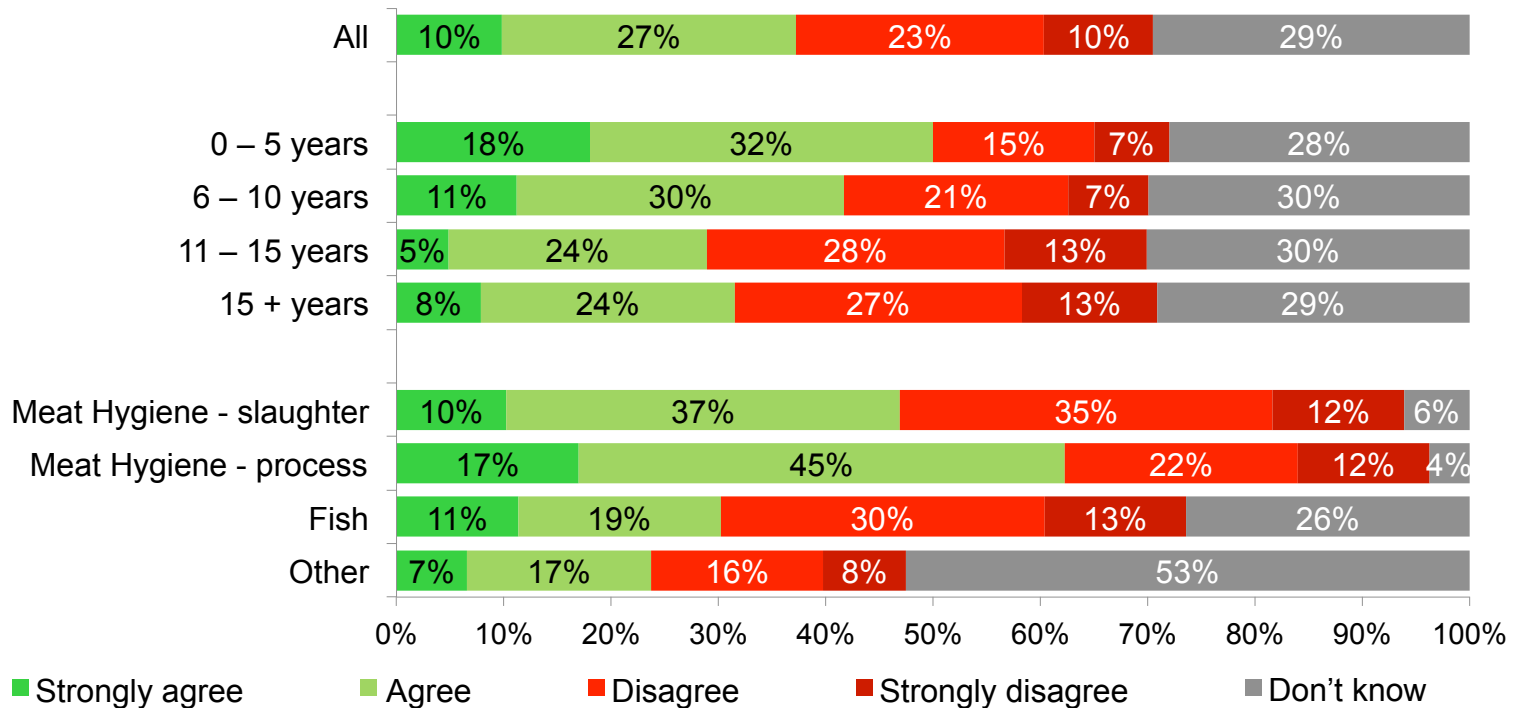
Do you agree or disagree with the following statement? | The Compliance Verification System has allowed me to be involved in day-to-day problem solving with industry to avoid problems in the plant from becoming problems that make people sick.



Overall, respondents are split on whether the Compliance Verification System allowed them to be involved in day to day problem solving. Just over a third (37%) of respondents felt that it had helped, while a third (33%) felt that it had not, a further 29% were unsure.

The Compliance Verification System

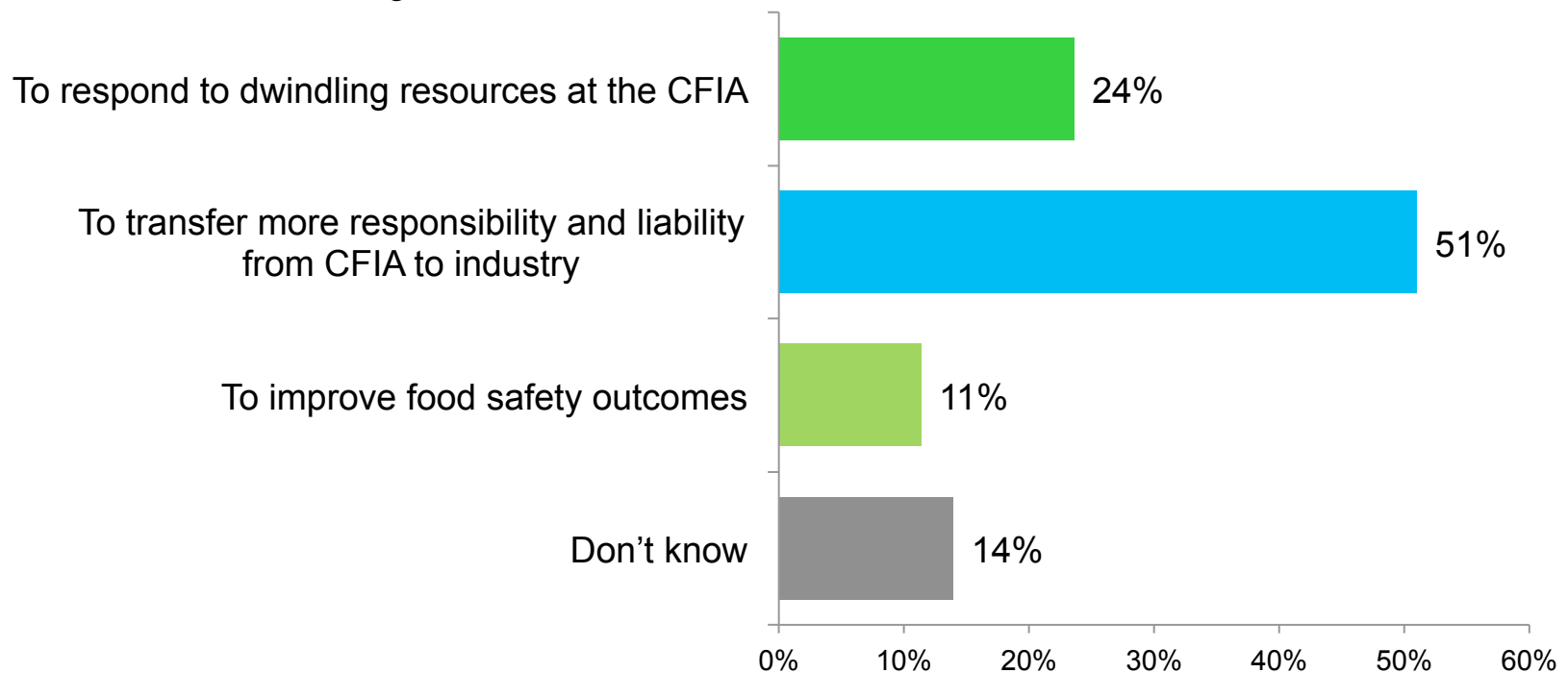
Do you agree or disagree with the following statement? | The Compliance Verification System has allowed me to be involved in day-to-day problem solving with industry to avoid problems in the plant from becoming problems that make people sick.



Those with five years of experience or less were most likely to have found the Compliance Verification System helpful (50%), while those with over 11 years of experience were less likely. Meanwhile, those working in the area of meat hygiene – process were most likely to have found the system helpful (62% agree), while those working in fish were less likely (30% agree).

Inspection Modernization

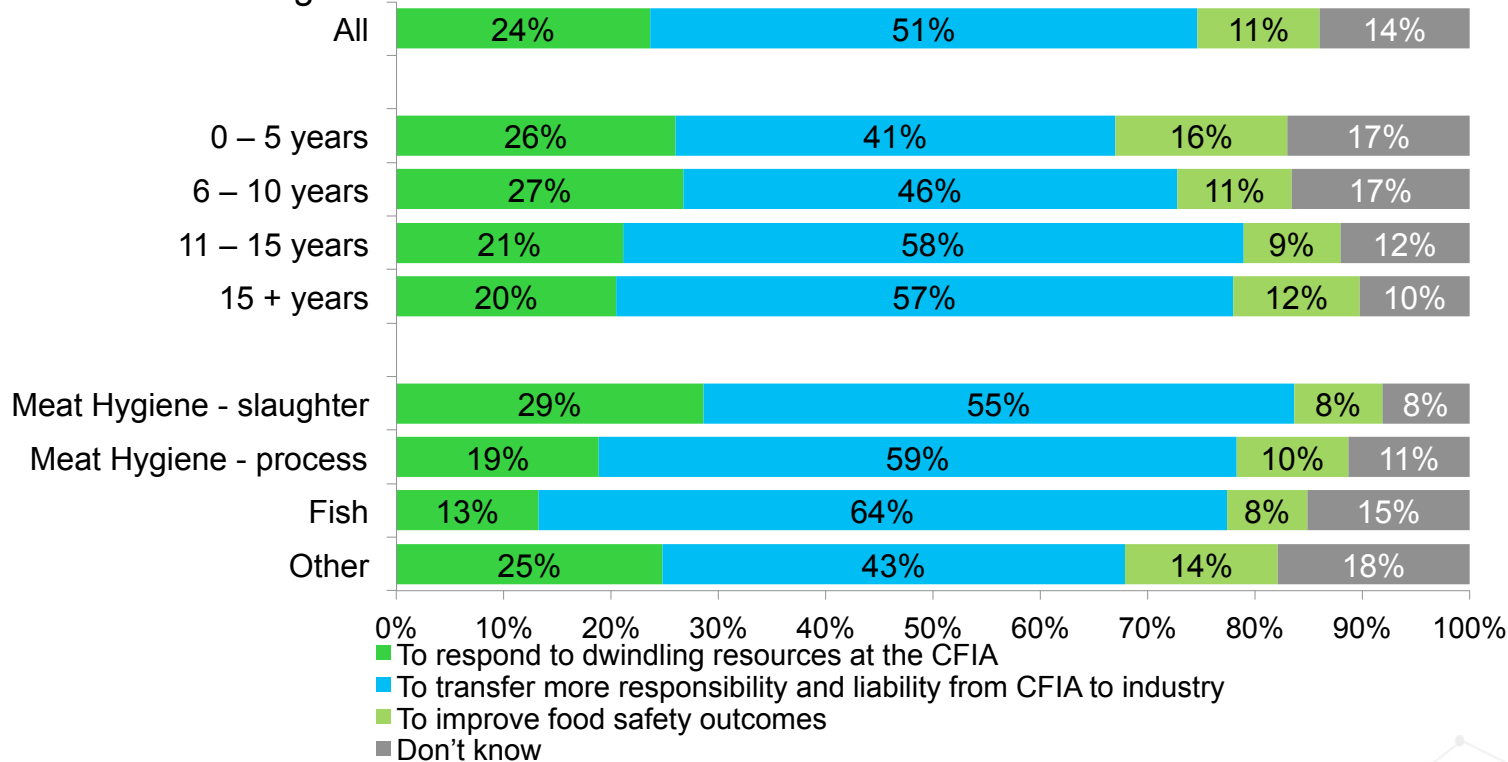
As you may know, the CFIA intends to replace the current commodity inspection system with a new system. The Agency is calling this change Inspection Modernization. In your opinion, what is the CFIA's motivation for doing this?



Overall, a majority (51%) of respondents believe that the CFIA's motivation for introducing Inspection Modernization is to transfer more responsibility and liability from CFIA to industry. Nearly a quarter (24%) feel it is to respond to dwindling resources at the CFIA, and just 11% feel it is to improve safety outcomes.

Inspection Modernization

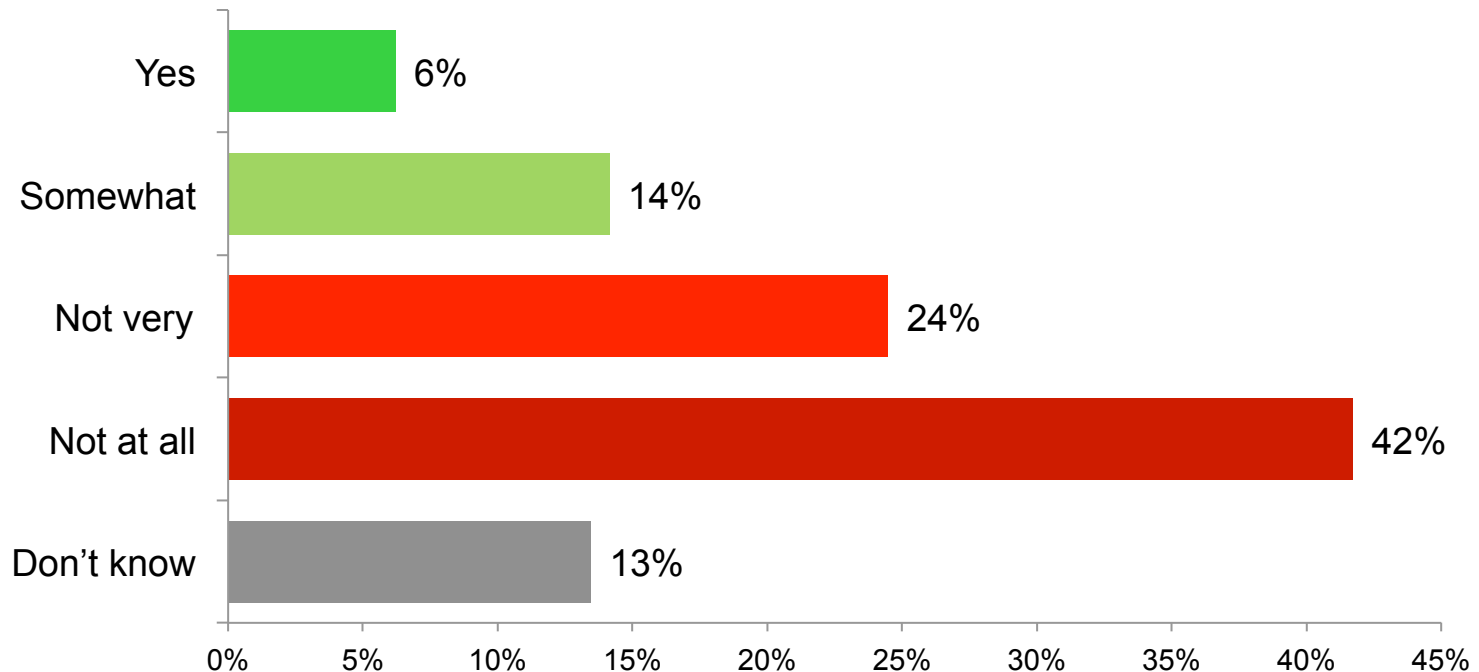
As you may know, the CFIA intends to replace the current commodity inspection system with a new system. The Agency is calling this change Inspection Modernization. In your opinion, what is the CFIA's motivation for doing this?



Those with less than five years experience are least likely to feel the motivation behind Inspection Modernization is to shift responsibility from CFIA to industry (41%), while those with over 11 years experience were most likely to feel that way (58%). Further, those working in areas of fish and meat hygiene - process were most likely to agree that the CFIA's motivation is to transfer responsibility (64% and 59%, respectively).

Inspection Modernization

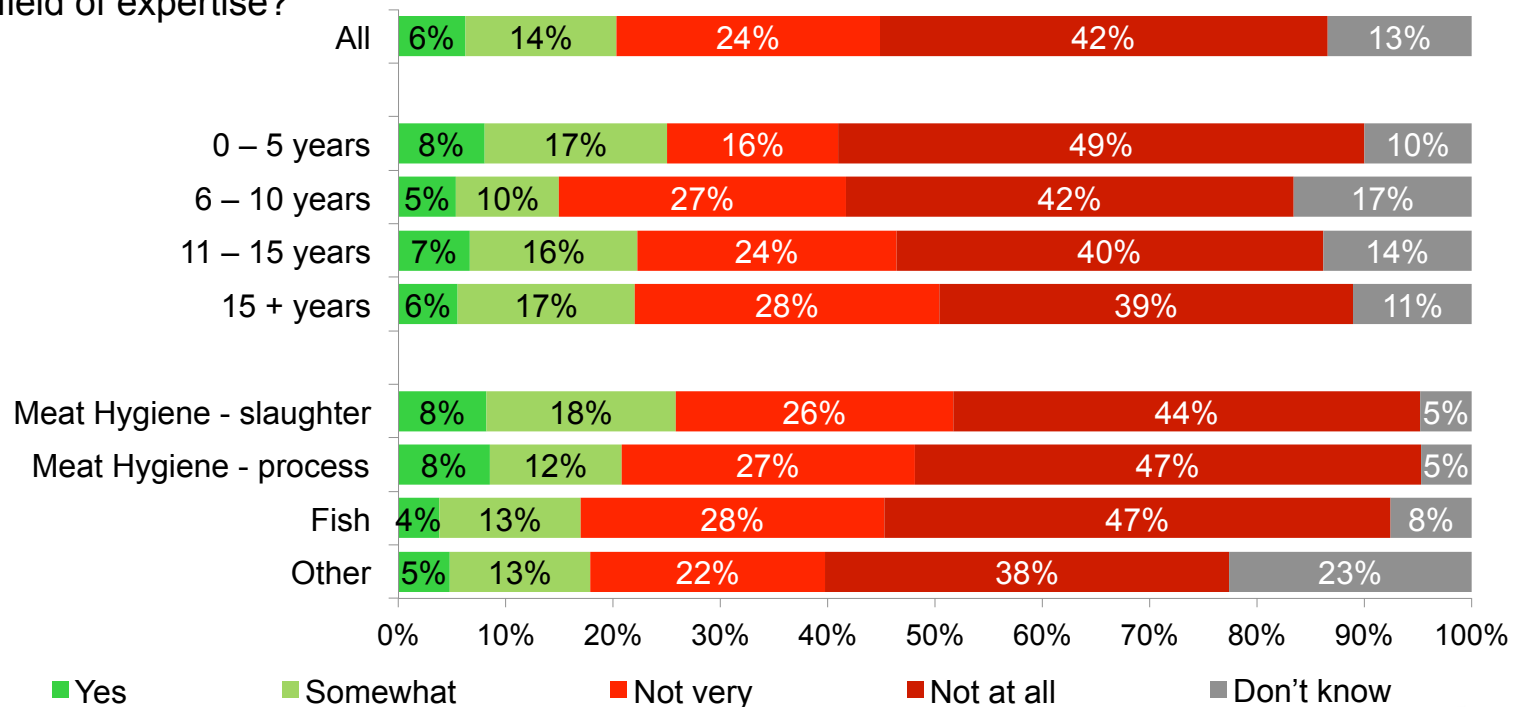
CFIA has said Inspection Modernization will allow the Agency to assign inspectors and frontline supervisors work outside of their area of expertise (for example, forestry experts inspecting fish, animal science experts inspecting plant material). Do you feel qualified to inspect products outside of your field of expertise?



When asked how qualified they would feel to inspect products outside of their field of expertise, two thirds (66%) feel they would be not very or not at all qualified. Just 20% feel qualified.

Inspection Modernization

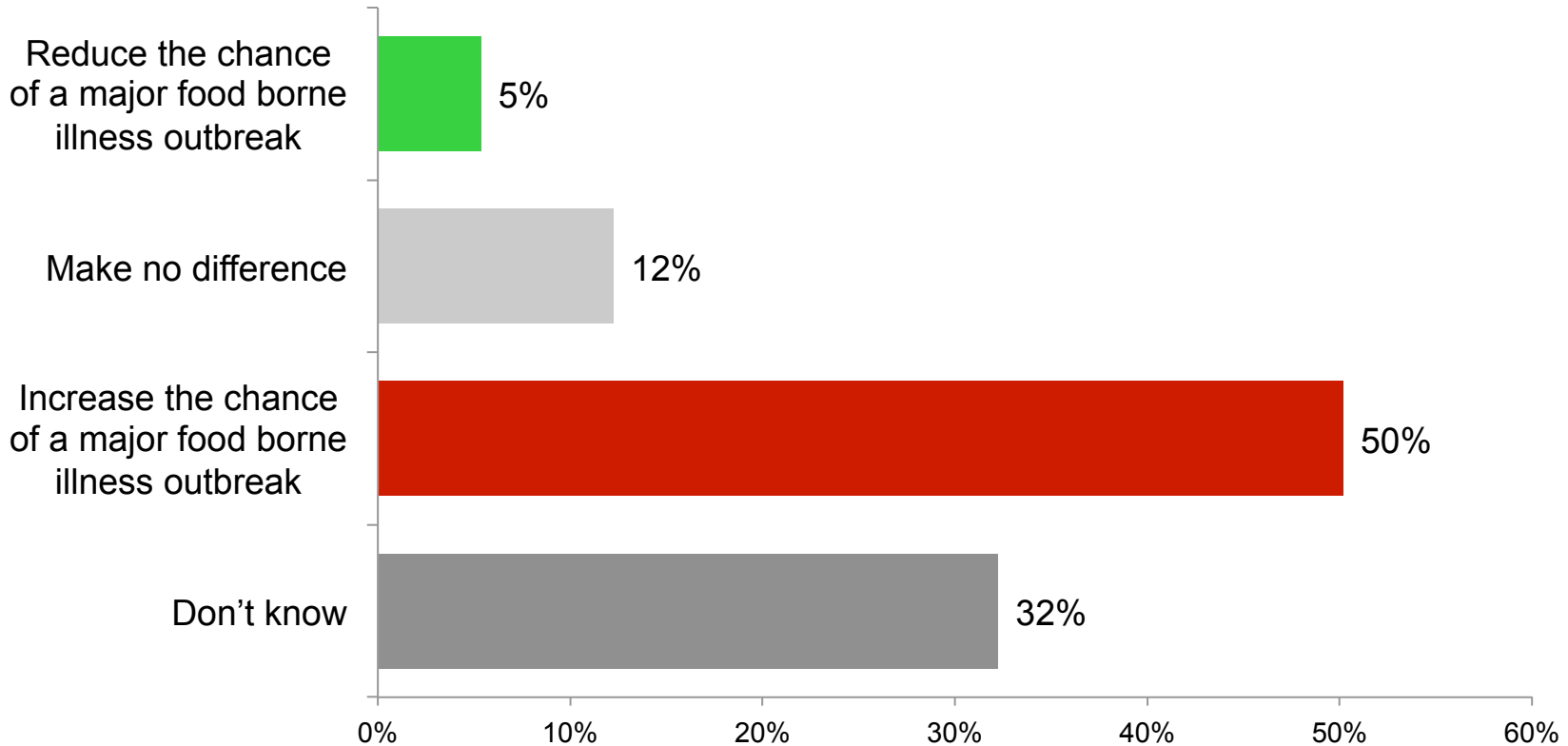
CFIA has said Inspection Modernization will allow the Agency to assign inspectors and frontline supervisors work outside of their area of expertise (for example, forestry experts inspecting fish, animal science experts inspecting plant material). Do you feel qualified to inspect products outside of your field of expertise?



A majority of all groups felt not very or not at all qualified to inspect products outside their field of expertise. There was minimal variation across demographic subgroups, however, feelings of qualification were lowest among those with 6-10 years experience (15%) and highest among those working in meat hygiene – slaughter (26%).

Impact of Inspection Modernization

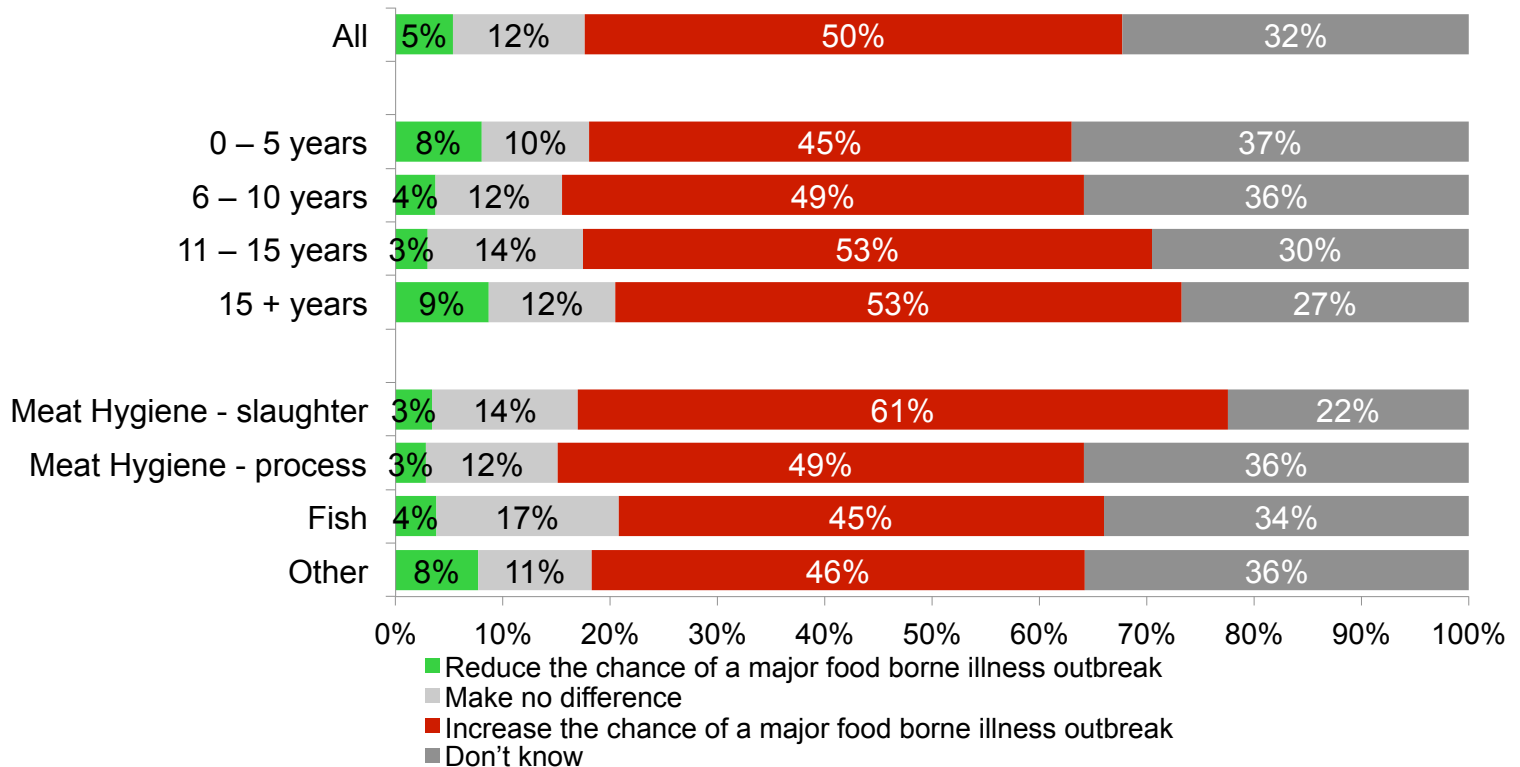
In your opinion, will the introduction of Inspection Modernization...



Overall, half of respondents (50%) felt that the introduction of Inspection Modernization would increase the risk of a major food borne illness outbreak, while just 5% felt it would reduce such risks.

Impact of Inspection Modernization

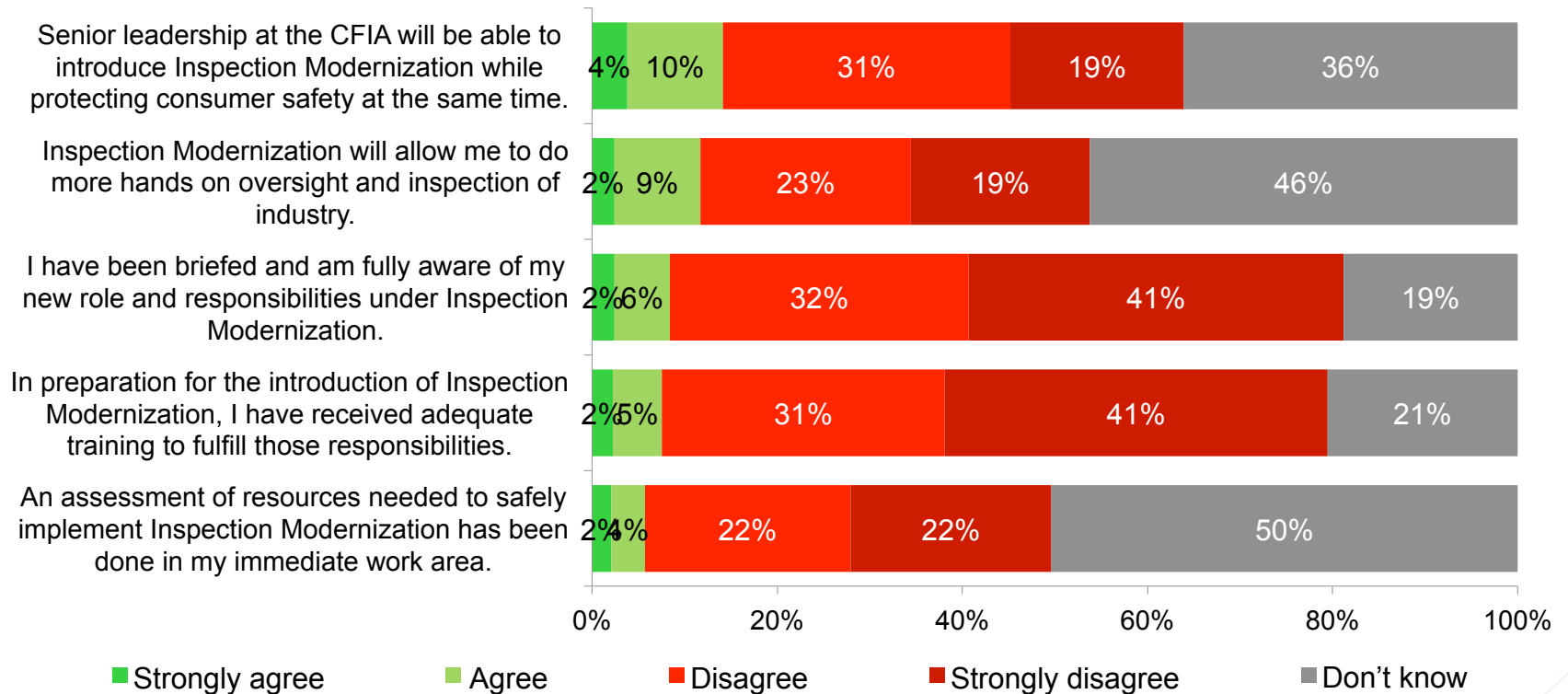
In your opinion, will the introduction of Inspection Modernization...



Across demographic subgroups, there appeared to be a relationship between experience and feelings of increased risk of an outbreak: those with less experience expressed greater uncertainty and lower levels of risk, while those with more experience were more likely to fear an outbreak and less likely to be unsure. Those working in the area of meat hygiene – slaughter were most likely to feel that Inspection Modernization would lead to an increased risk of a major outbreak, at 61%.

Inspection Modernization

Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?



When a range of statements were tested about the introduction of Inspection Modernization, respondents were overall lacking confidence in the program's ability to protect consumer safety, felt it would limit hands-on oversight, did not feel they had been briefed on their new roles, and did not feel they had been trained on their new responsibilities.



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