2026 Digital Maturity Benchmark Study | FULL FINDINGS · SUPPORTING ANALYSIS

The Digital Maturity Benchmark

About the study, and How Return on Tech Investment Is Addressed Across Digital Maturity Levels

Comparing early-stage vs. high maturity companies, drawn from the 2026 Food Safety Digital Maturity Benchmark (n=290).

2026 Edition · Food Safety Tech Research (FSTR)

About Food Safety Tech Research (*FSTR*)

The intelligence layer for food safety technology.

FSTR, pronounced "***Faster***", is a research and advisory firm focused exclusively on the intersection of food safety, technology, and data-driven operational performance.

We study the digitization of food safety and supporting technology to understand:

- What adoption and related practices are taking place?
- To what extent (or not) does digitization deliver intended (or unintended) results? …and ***Why***?
- What can we learn from organizations that are successfully achieving objectives with their investments?

About the Research

The 2026 Digital Maturity Benchmark Study:

- Data collection July – Sep 2026
- 290 respondent companies (highly qualified from over 340 completed submissions)
- Survey program to understand adoption and related performance impact

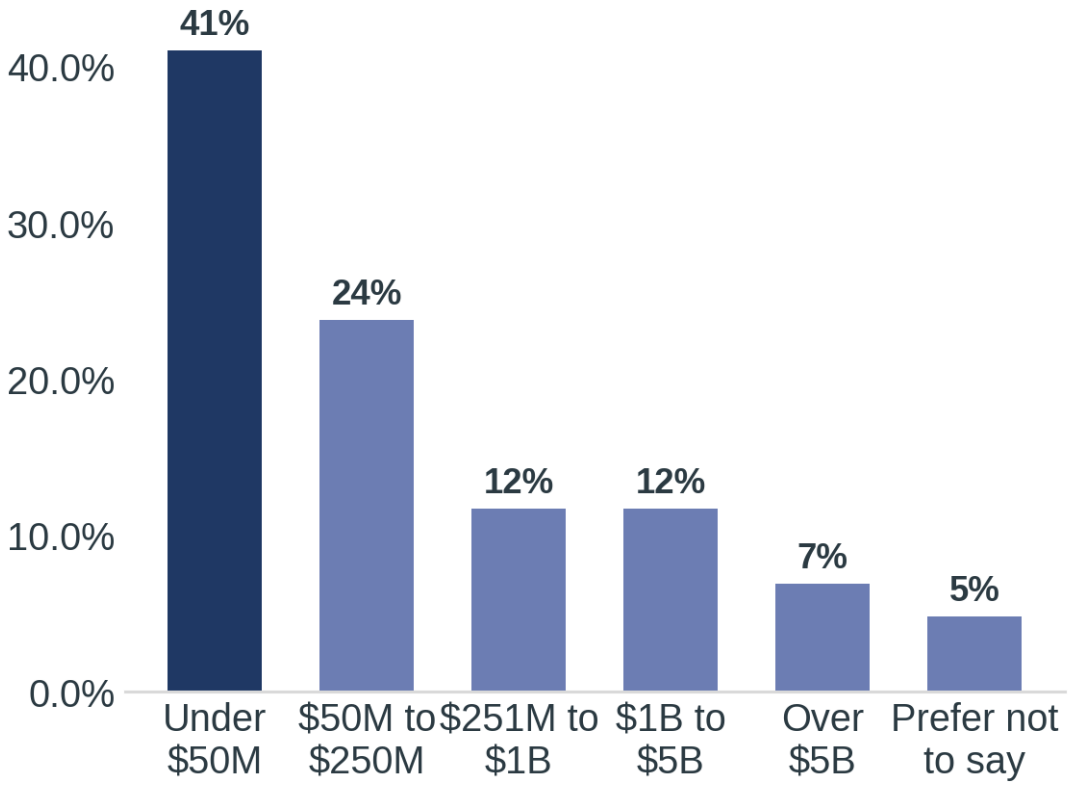
Measurement of:

- **Tech adoption**
- **Performance KPIs**
- **ROI of Tech investments**
- **Self-reported maturity**

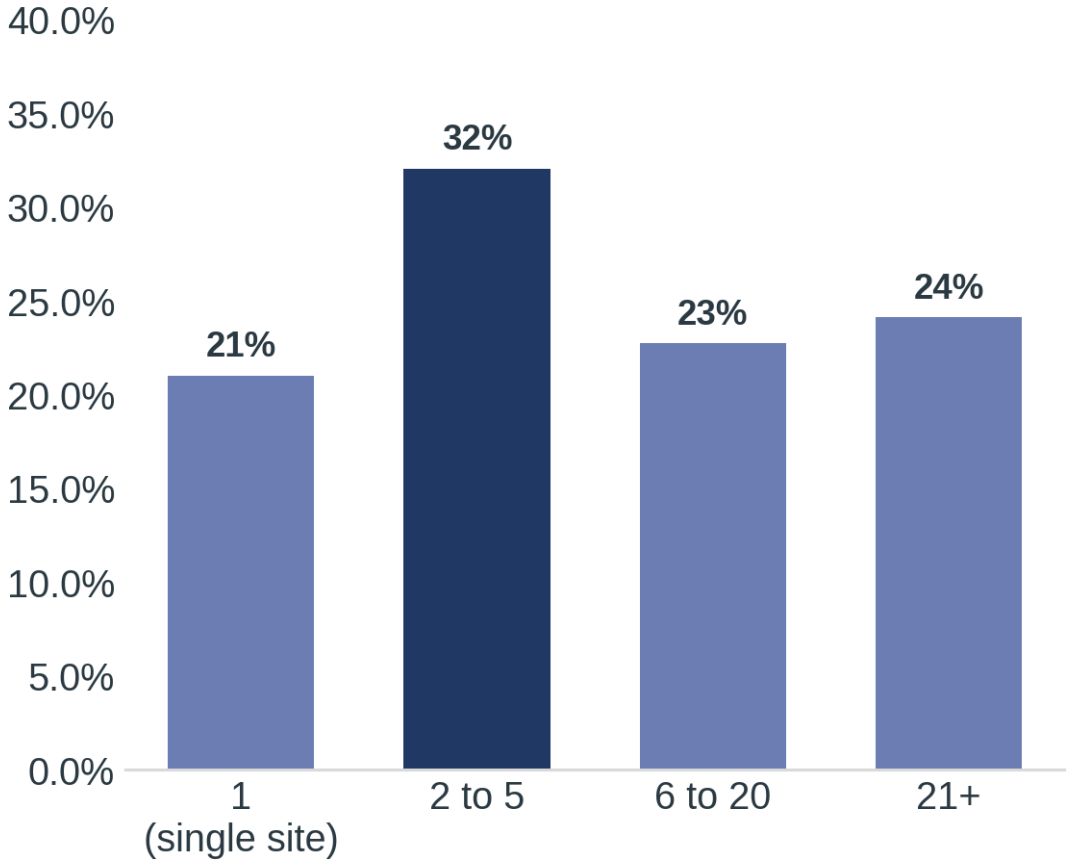
} **Digital Maturity**

Who We Surveyed: Company Size

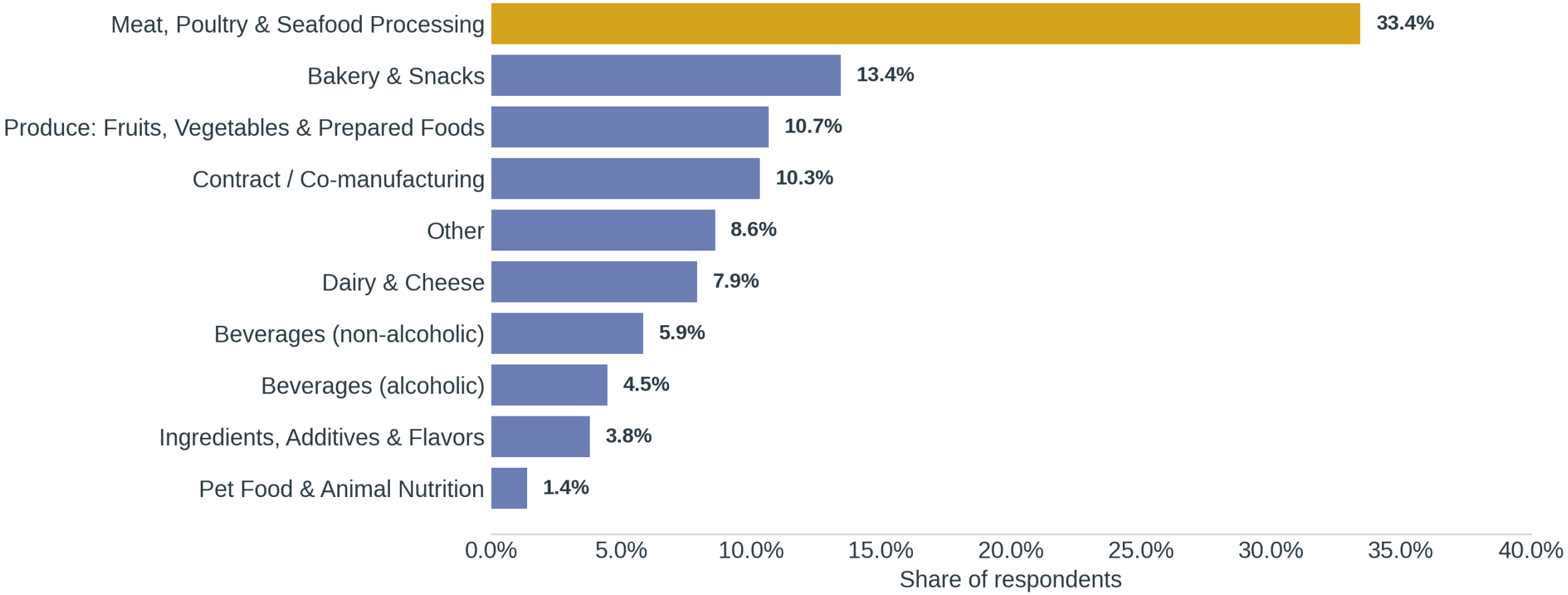
By Annual Revenue



By Number of Facilities

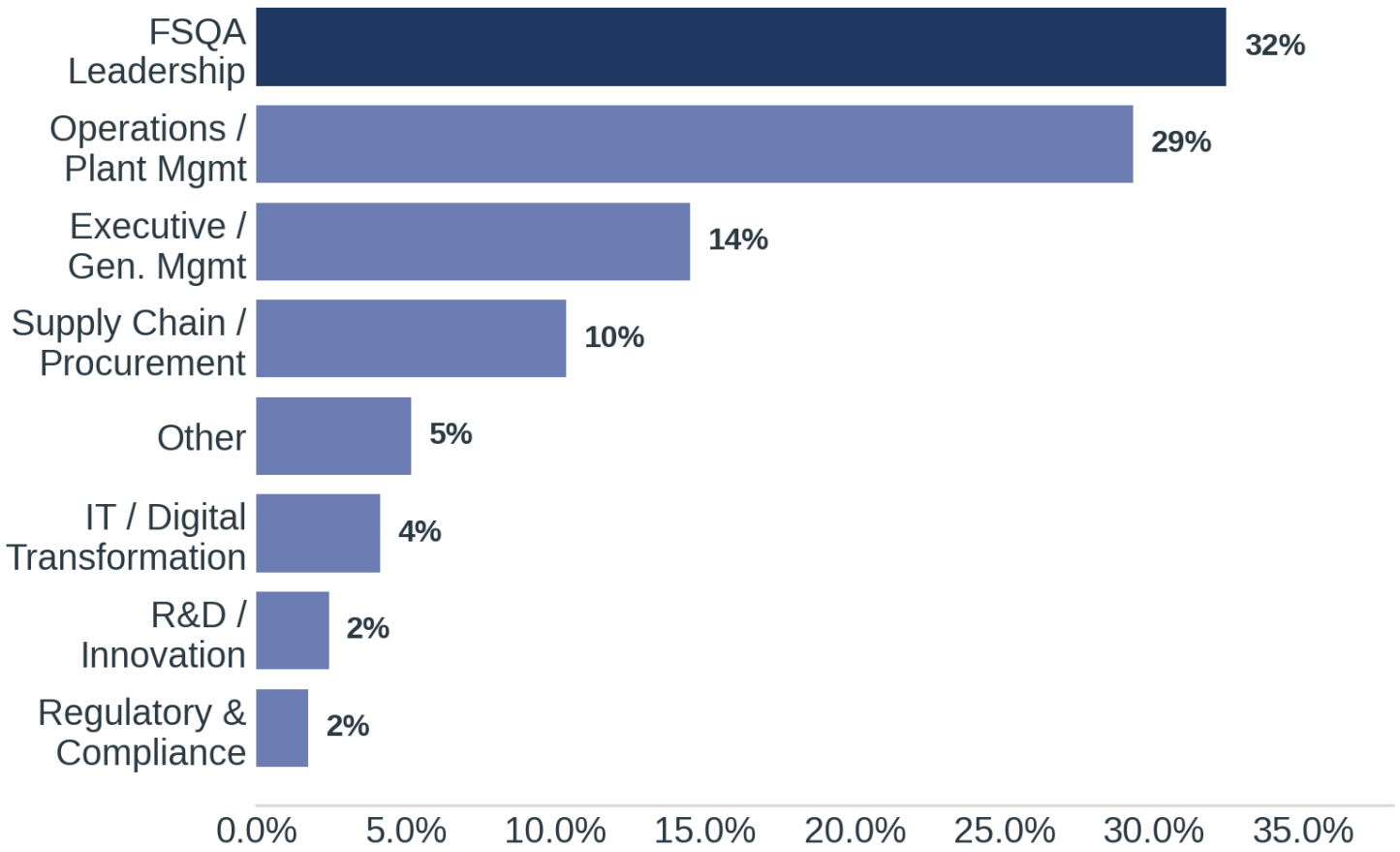


Who We Surveyed: Industry Segment

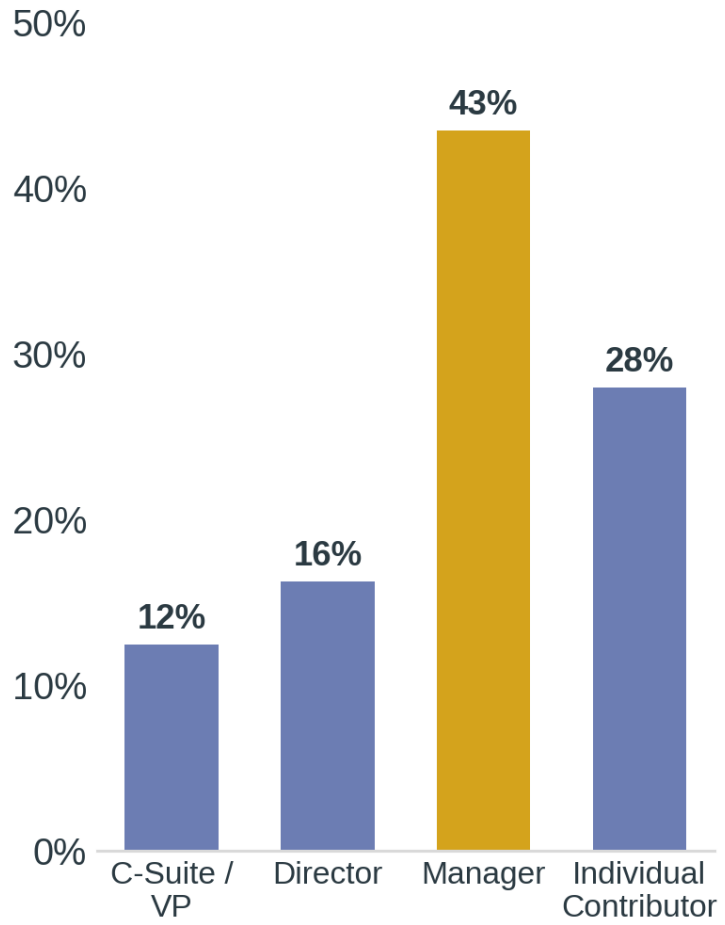


Who We Surveyed: Role and Seniority

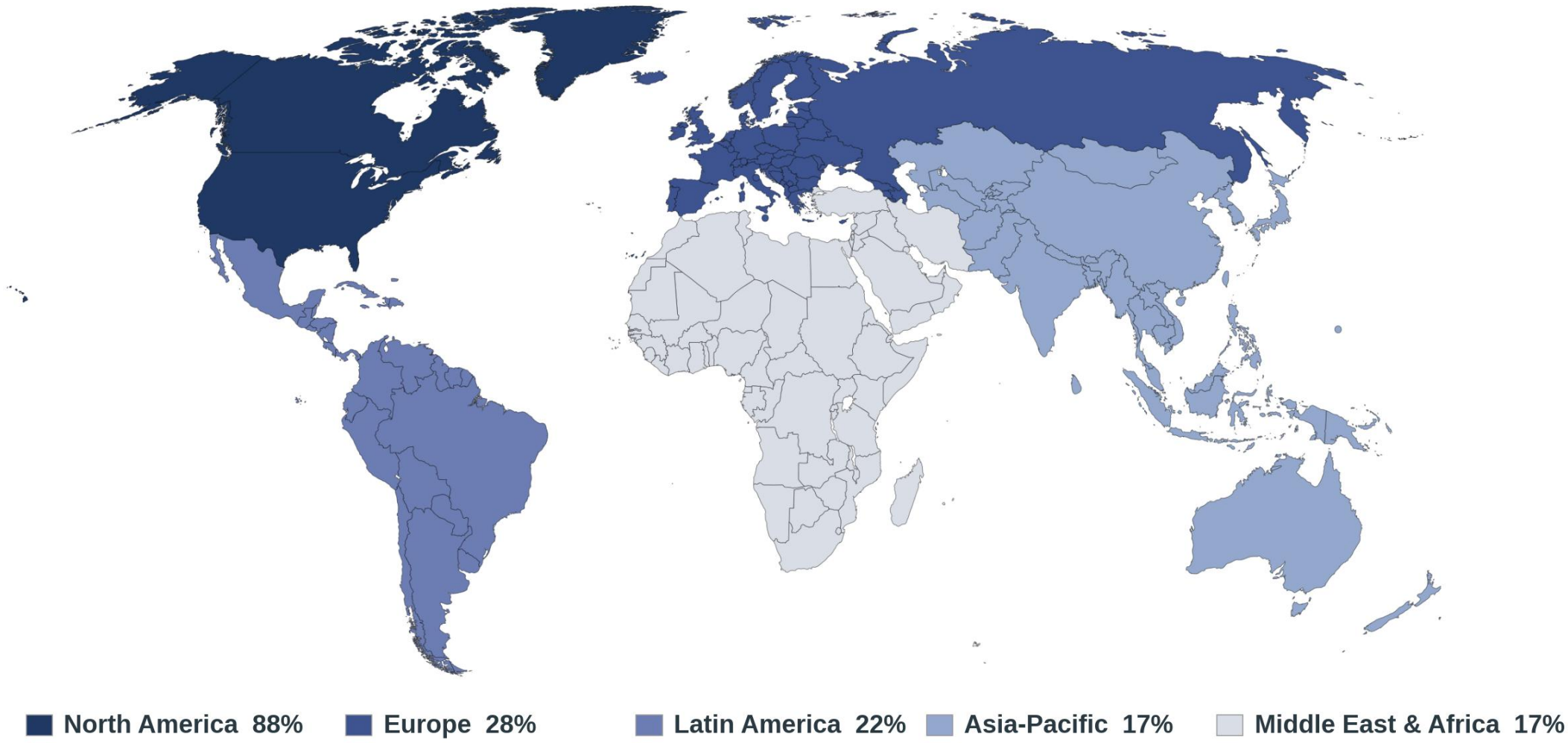
By Job Function



By Seniority



Where Do Respondent Companies Operate?



About the Digital Maturity Model – How Each Company's Maturity was Determined

25%

Self-assessment

Each company's own rating against the five-stage model.

41%

of companies kept the stage they gave themselves once the evidence was added

37.5%

Technology adoption

6 measures, two equal halves

WHAT IS IN PLACE

- Food safety functions digitized
- Food safety technologies deployed
- Level of system integration

ORGANIZATIONAL READINESS

- Years on the digital journey
- Senior management support
- Self-rated confidence in digital capability

37.5%

Performance results

18 measures, each weighted equally

Risk & Corrective Action

OBJECTIVES MET

- Faster incident detection
- Shorter CAPA cycle time
- Better audit readiness
- Verifiable info for regulators

KPIs IMPROVED

- CAPA cycle time
- Audit scores / pass rates
- Critical non-conformances
- Recall frequency / scope
- EMP positive rate
- Supplier non-conformances
- Traceability exercise time
- Customer complaint rate

Waste & Efficiency

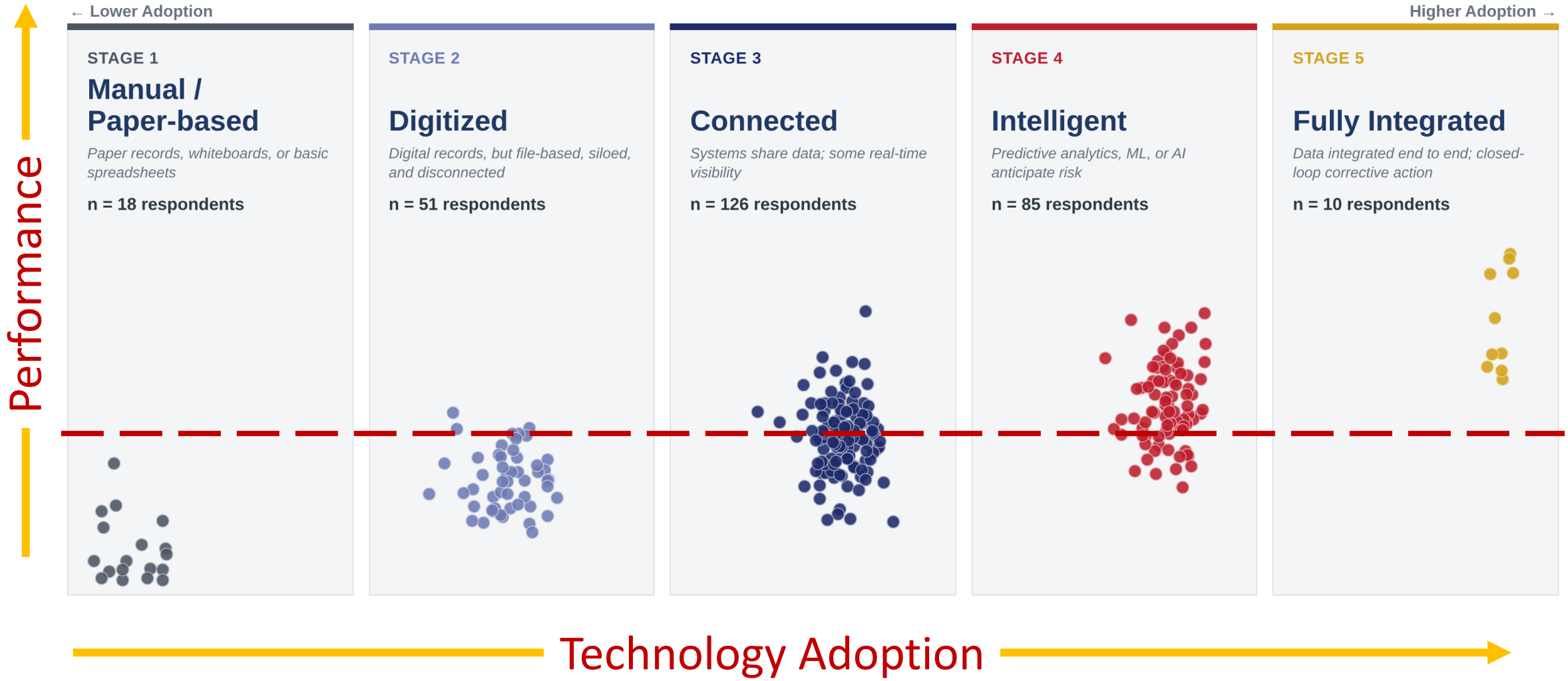
OBJECTIVES MET

- Higher staff efficiency
- Less waste, scrap, rework

KPIs IMPROVED

- Scrap and rework rate
- Equipment / line downtime
- Training completion
- Cost of poor quality

The Digital Maturity Benchmark



How the Two Groups Are Defined

GROUP 1 n = 195

Early Stage 1-3

- Manual, Semi-Digitized, and Connected organizations
- 67% of the qualified sample
- Actively building digital capability, not yet predictive

GROUP 2 n = 95

Advanced: Stages 4-5

- Intelligent and Fully Integrated organizations
- 33% of the qualified sample
- Predictive, proactive, and (at Stage 5) AI-assisted operations

Maturity stage score weighting reflects a triangulated measure, not self-report alone:

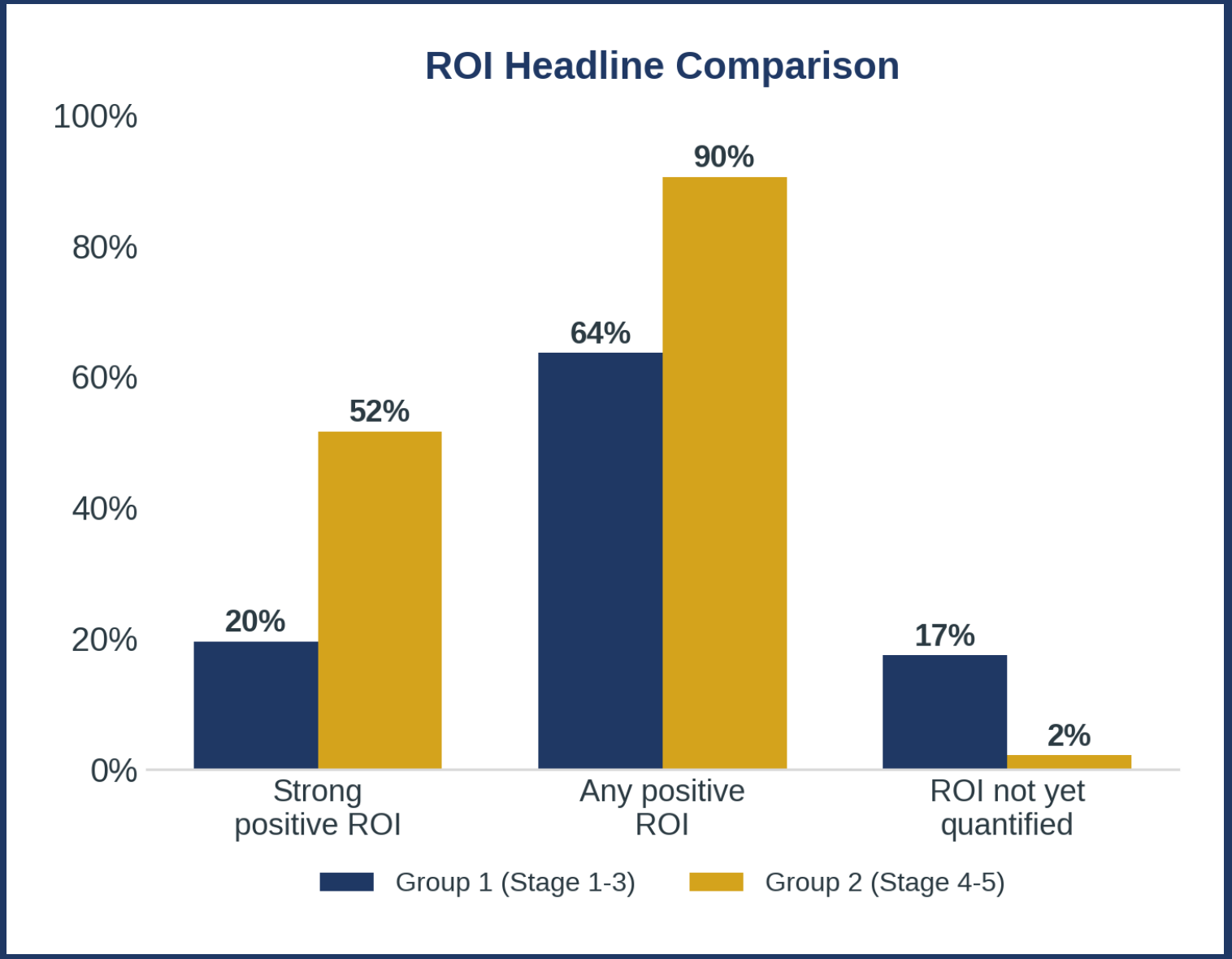
- 37.5% verified technology adoption
- 37.5% reported food safety performance outcomes. All comparisons in this analysis use this measure
- 25% self-reported digital maturity

THE HEADLINE

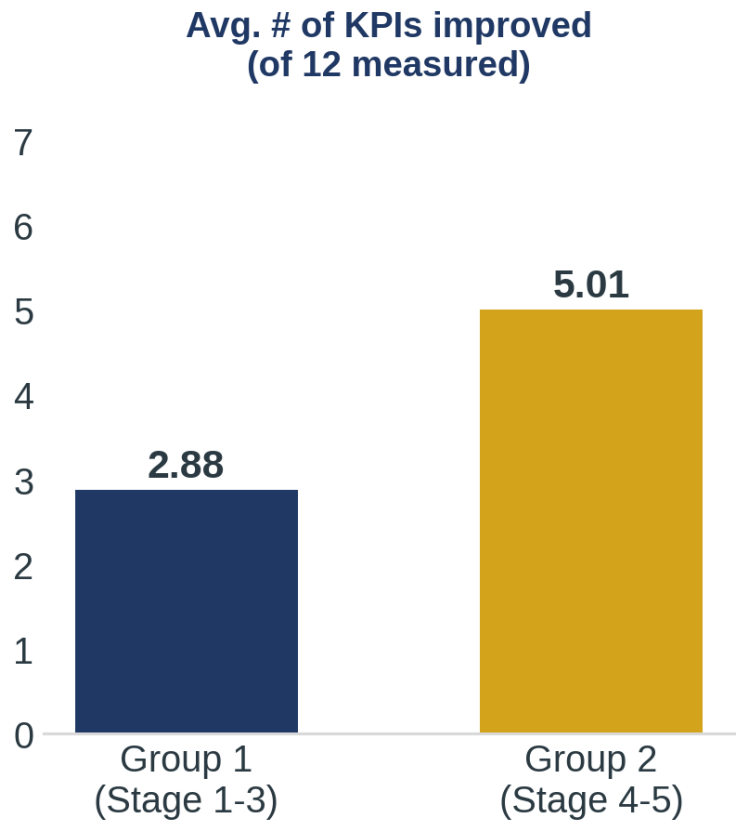
2.6×

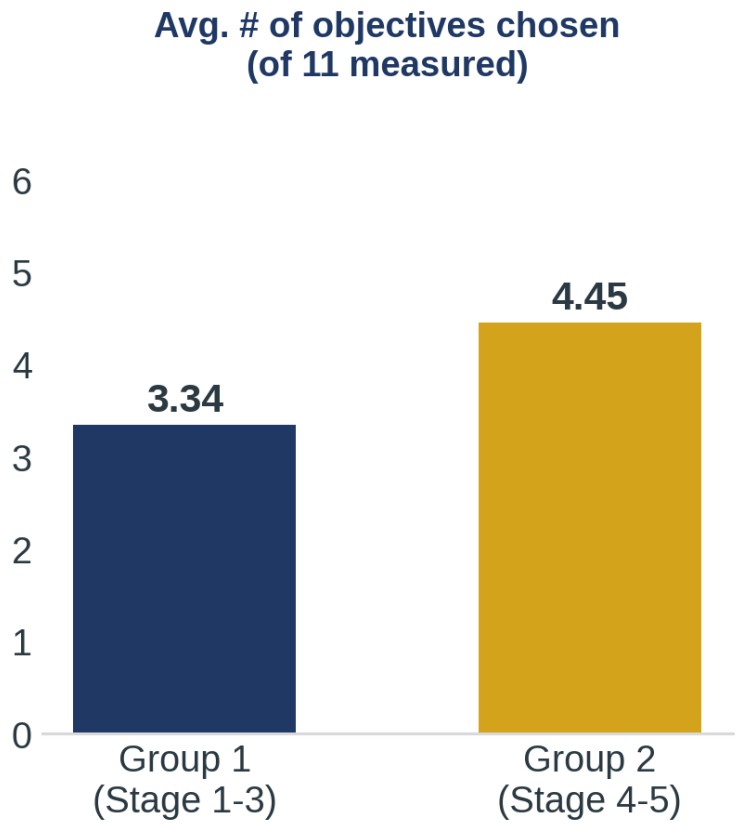
more likely to report strong positive ROI

52% of Group 2 (Stage 4-5) organizations report strong positive ROI, versus **20%** of Group 1 (Stage 1-3).



The Breadth of Impact: KPIs Measured vs. Objectives Met



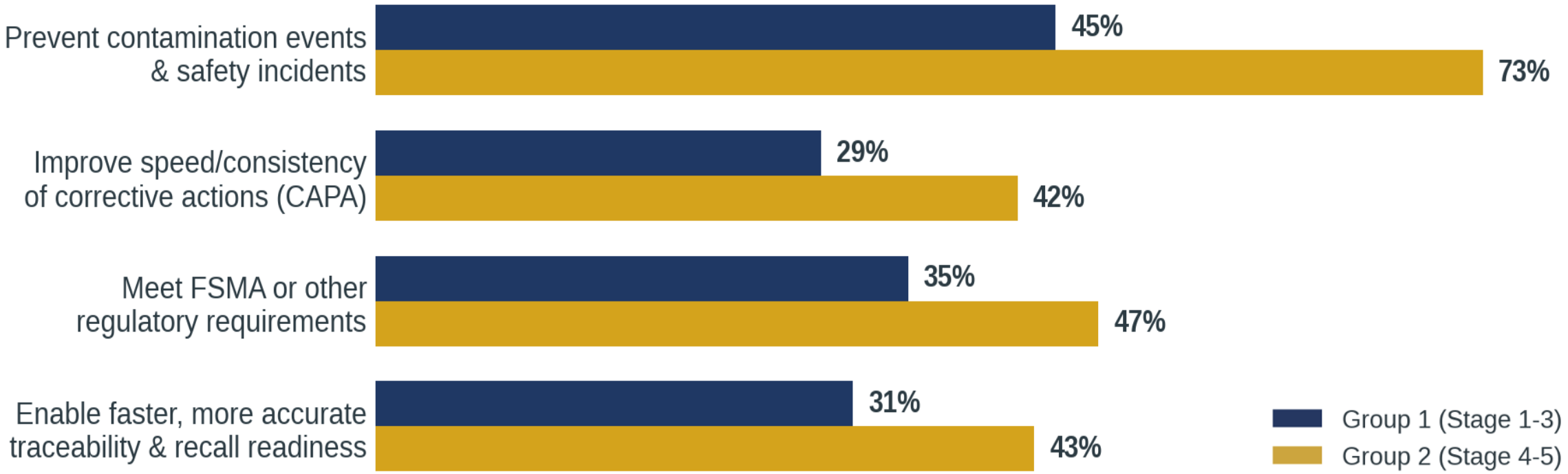


Digitally mature organizations set more objectives (4.45 vs. 3.34)

and **deliver on more of them.**

What They Set Out to Achieve: Top 4 Investment Objectives

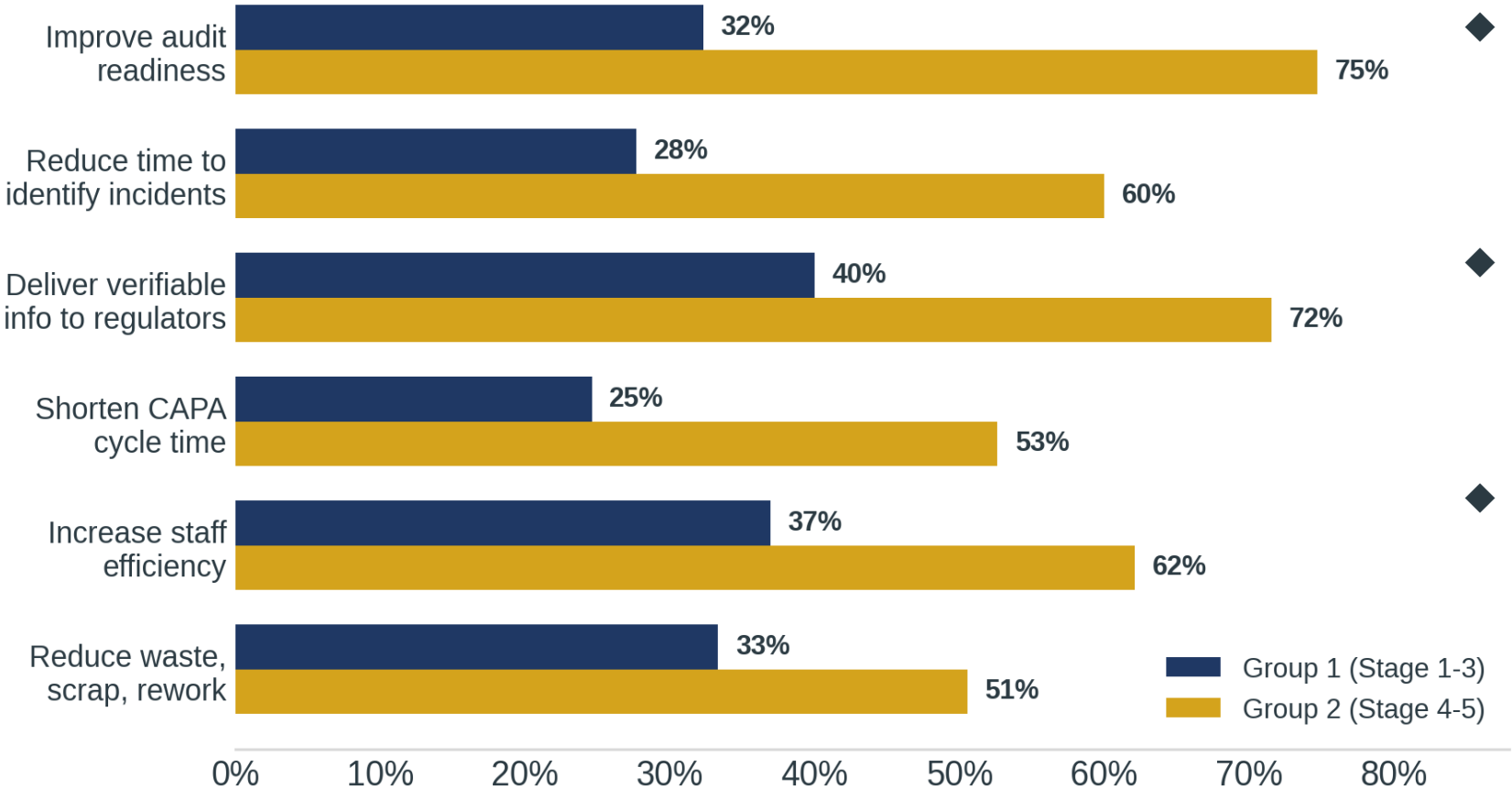
Top 4 objectives selected, out of 11 measured (Group 2 vs Group 1)



- Noteworthy: **"building a data foundation for predictive risk"** (11% vs 11%). This is a forward-looking goal not yet being addressed by either maturity group.

But wait… isn't this supposed to be what AI delivers?!

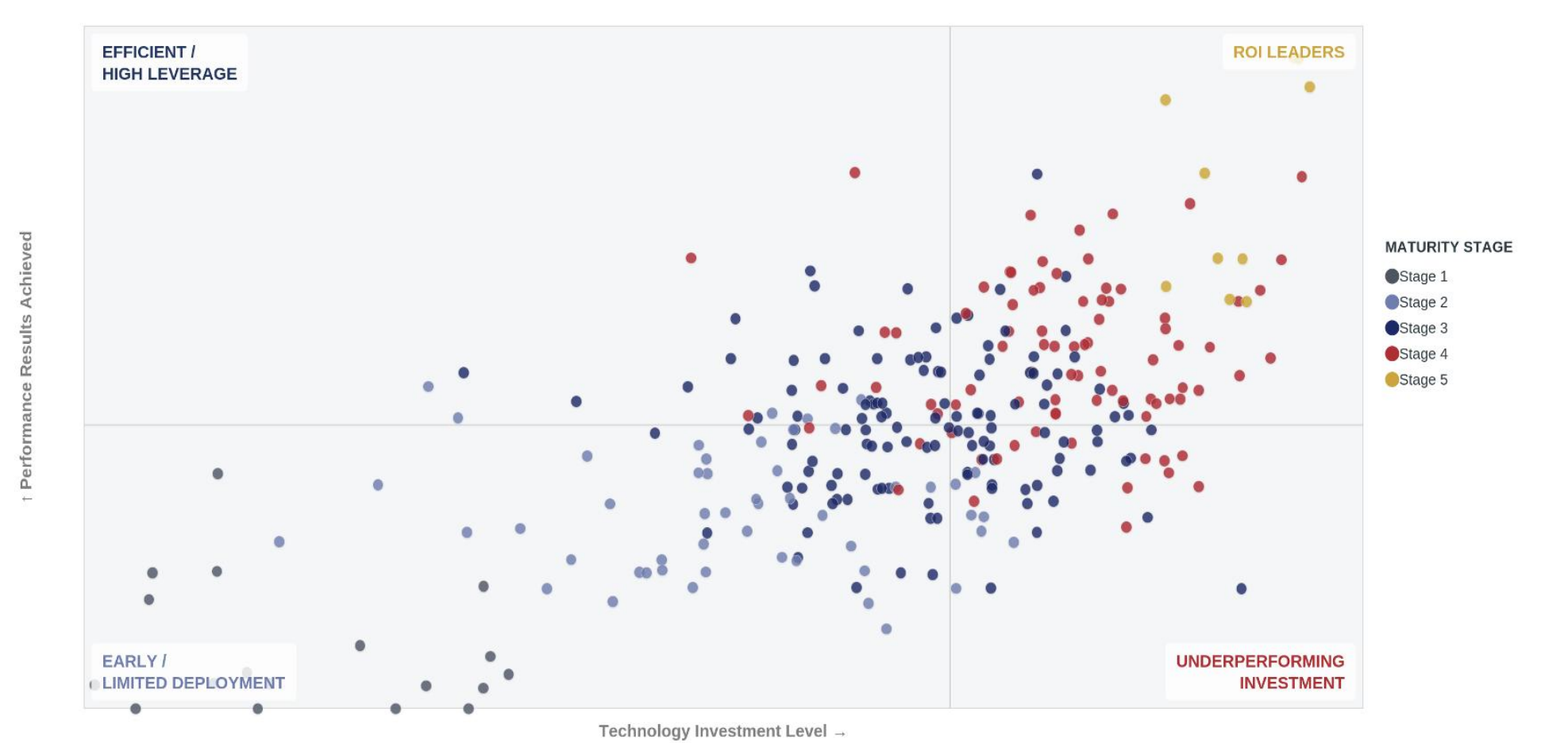
Were Performance Objectives Met?



- Every one of the six objectives measured shows **a statistically significant gap** ($p<0.0001$), the most consistent pattern in this analysis.
- **Audit readiness shows the widest gap**: 75% of Group 2 report it fully met, versus 32% of Group 1, a 42-point difference.
- A direct link to ROI:

Gaining back **TIME!**

ROI Quadrant



- **ROI Leaders**: high investment, high results
- **Underperforming**: high investment, low results
- **Efficient / High Leverage**: low investment, high results
- **Early / Limited Deployment**: low investment, low results

Key Takeaways

1 **ROI and maturity move together, loosely.**

Strong positive ROI is 2.6× more common as maturity increases. Negative ROI is rare everywhere; **the real risk is not knowing**.

2 **Execution, more than ambition, drives the gap.**

Objective selection differs modestly between groups, but objective achievement differs enormously.

3 **The performance gap is broad, not narrow.**

Mature organizations improve nearly twice as many KPIs on average, and outperforms on 10 of 12 individual metrics measured, not just one or two headline numbers.

4 **One objective sets mature organizations apart.**

Preventing contamination and safety incidents is the single largest gap in what organizations choose to pursue. **Audit readiness and reducing time-to-information** are how they got there.

What This Means

FOR FOOD SUPPLIERS

- **If you can't yet quantify ROI, you are not alone**: on average, well over half of respondent organizations are in the same position. Start with baseline KPI tracking before adding new tools.
- Treat objective follow-through as seriously as objective-setting. The data shows **achievement, not ambition, is what separates the two groups**.
- **Prioritize contamination and incident prevention** as the lead objective for your next investment case; it is what the most mature organizations rally around.
- **Expect measurable improvement to take time**. Tracking across more than just one or two KPIs is the pattern seen at higher maturity.

FOR FOOD SAFETY TECH SOLUTION PROVIDERS

- **ROI proof points sell.** What are specific KPIs behind your solutions, not just feature descriptions.
- **Build implementation support around objective achievement**; customers with unmet objectives are your highest churn risk.
- **Contamination and incident prevention is the sharpest wedge issue**; lead with it over compliance or fear-based recall messaging.
- **Offer KPI baselining as a standard onboarding step**; it is a precondition for the ROI story that will eventually need to be told internally.

Why This Matters

For Food Suppliers: *Investment level alone does not guarantee value.*

- Organizations are investing heavily without proportional results.
- Execution and integration matter as much as the size of the check written.

For Food Safety Tech Solution Providers:

- “Underperforming Investment” customers represent both a real renewal and expansion risk,
- Do you have professional services, implementation support, or data-quality consulting?

WHAT ACTIONS TO TAKE

For Food Suppliers:

- Assess honestly whether results have kept pace with investment.
- Implementation quality and change management matter as much as the buying experience.

For Food Safety Tech Solution Providers:

- Identify underperforming investment vs. outcomes
- Prioritize customer success intervention vs. ”soft touch sales calls” to lower renewal risk.

FoodSafetyTech Research

FINDINGS REPORT

Food Safety Digital Maturity Benchmark

2026 Industry Benchmark Findings: Digital Maturity, Technology Investment, and Performance Outcomes Across Food & Beverage Manufacturing

290 food and beverage manufacturers, benchmarked on digital maturity and the operational results (such as CAPA cycle time, recalls, waste, downtime) that maturity delivers. This report is written for food safety and operations leaders, and for the technology providers who serve them.

2026 Edition • 290 Qualified Respondents

Food Safety Tech Rese
Fi

FoodSafetyTech Research

2026 FOOD SAFETY DIGITAL MATURITY BENCHMARK

Your Digital Maturity Scorecard

Prepared for benchmark respondent **#273853925** · **Meat, Poultry & Seafood Processing** · $251 million to $1 billion revenue · 21 to 100 facilities · North America · October 2026

This scorecard compares your organization's survey answers with those of all 290 food and beverage manufacturers in the 2026 benchmark. The top panel shows your overall digital maturity score (0 to 100) and the maturity stage it places you in, with every other respondent shown as a grey dot. The lower panel ranks you on eight building blocks of maturity: 50 is typical, a dot further right means you are ahead of more of your peers, and each block is labeled a **strength** (navy), **on par** (grey), or an **opportunity** (red).

Overall maturity: 57 of 100, Stage 3 (Connected)

Ahead of 59% of all 290 respondents and 81% of Stage 3 organizations.
Your self-assessment: Stage 5 (Fully Integrated).



Your building blocks of maturity

FOUNDATION

Food safety functions digitized
8 of 13 functions

Technologies deployed
7 of 13 technologies

System integration
Mostly integrated

READINESS

Transformation tenure
More than 5 years

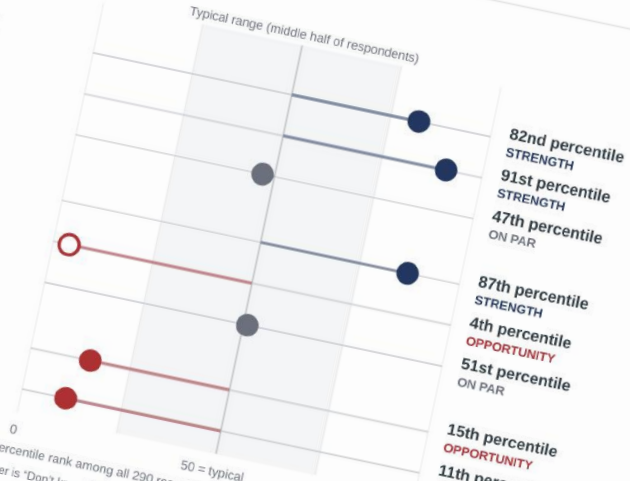
Leadership support
Answered "Don't know" *

AI use
Partial use

RESULTS

Risk & corrective action results
Objectives moderately met; 1 KPI improved

Waste & efficiency results
Objectives moderately met; no KPI improved



* Leadership support is scored at the lowest tier when the answer is "Don't know." The hollow
shows a visibility gap, not necessarily a lack of support.

THANK YOU FOR ATTENDING THE SESSION!

David Hatch
Chief Research Officer, Food Safety Tech Research (FSTR)

foodsafetytech.com/research