

Do European Consumers Buy GM Foods? ("Consumerchoice")

Access the report here: <http://www.kcl.ac.uk/consumerchoice>

This project, funded by the European Commission, addressed the question of whether consumers in the EU buy GM-foods when they are available on the shelves of grocery stores. As part of the ongoing debate on this and related issues, there have been many opinion polls asking people what they would do about GM-foods but few, if any, direct investigations of what they do actually do in practice when they go shopping. The project therefore also explored the question of whether opinion polls are reliable indicators of people's actions.

Findings:

- When given the possibility, European consumers do purchase GM foods. There is a difference between the consumers' behavioural intentions and what they actually do. Whatever people say in opinion polls, most do not actively avoid GM foods in the grocery stores, suggesting that they are not really concerned about the GM issue. Also contrary to previous beliefs, GM does not appear high in a list of worries about food.
- The shopping behaviour was not influenced by the GM labels, but rather by other factors such as quality (incl. taste, appearance, packaging) or the familiarity with the brand.
- The most important factor determining GM food purchase is the decision of retailers to make them available in stores
- Whilst a decade ago consumers had a wary behaviour towards GM products, at present, consumers recognize both risks and benefits from GM foods.
- During the group discussions, consumers considered GM products beneficial in the current situation of climate change and food shortages.

Conclusions:

The study demonstrates that in actual fact public perception in the EU is much more favourable towards GM foods than it is commonly portrayed.

This study also explains why European Farmers, who are increasingly choosing not only to import GM material for feed but also to grow biotech crops themselves, are doing so because they have a market in Europe just as elsewhere in the world. In late September, 7 EU countries (Spain, Portugal, Poland, Romania, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Germany) showed that the planting of biotech crops in the EU has increased by 21% overall in the EU this year and that some countries such as Romania and Poland had increased cultivation areas by 10 fold.