

<http://www.foodinsight.org/GMO-survey>



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Survey: Nearly Half of U.S. Consumers Avoid GMO Foods; Large Majority Primarily Concerned About Human Health Impact

Proposed Federal Bioengineered (BE) Foods Disclosure Suggests Lower Consumer Acceptance, Less Willingness to Pay Under Various Labeling Options

(Washington, D.C.)—[Labels](#) proposed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) to disclose “bioengineered” (BE) foods dramatically increase a wide variety of consumer concerns, especially regarding human health.



Those are among the findings of new research by the International Food Information Council (IFIC) Foundation into areas where AMS sought comments on its proposed BE labeling standards, as well as consumers’ views generally of genetically modified foods, or GMOs.

Concerns Arise When BE Foods Are Labeled

With AMS’s July 3 deadline to [comment](#) on the [National Bioengineered Food Disclosure Law](#) fast approaching, the IFIC Foundation tested reactions to the three BE labeling symbols and two variations of text disclosures. In every combination, levels of concern across a variety of factors increased—often substantially—when a disclosure label was applied.

For example, consumers were shown bottles of canola oil 1) without any BE logo or text, 2) with one of the three symbols (a plant, a sun or a smile), 3) with a symbol, plus “bioengineered” in text and 4) with a symbol, plus “may be bioengineered” in text. An additional group of consumers were shown just text disclosure, without any BE logo.

When shown the bottle without any disclosure, approximately one-third (**31 percent**) of a group of respondents had human health concerns. But that rose to **50 percent** when shown the BE “plant” symbol, further increasing to **51 percent** when text was added to indicate that the product was “bioengineered,” and to **57 percent** when “may be



bioengineered” was added to the “plant” logo. Human health concerns almost always showed the greatest increase, compared to other factors such as animal health or environmental concerns.

The survey also asked about broader perceptions of GMOs. More than one-third (**36 percent**) of respondents said they know very little or nothing at all about bioengineered or genetically modified foods, identical to the number who say they know at least a fair amount. Despite the low level of knowledge, a greater number (**47 percent**) said they avoid GMO foods at least somewhat.

The vast majority (**85 percent**) of those who avoid GMOs do so out of human health concerns, with the environment (**43 percent**), animal health (**36 percent**) and agriculture/farming (**34 percent**) concerns trailing far behind.

“Despite broad scientific consensus that GMOs are safe to consume, a majority of Americans seem to be convinced otherwise. It’s a significant disconnect and it underscores the need for more creative public education on the science behind our food,” said [Joseph Clayton](#), CEO of the IFIC Foundation.

What Is the Right Amount of Disclosure?

When consumers were asked which combination of logo and text provided the “right amount” of information, a significant majority said that any of the three logo disclosures plus the text disclosure provided the right amount. Far fewer said that the logos alone provided the right amount.

Consumers were also asked how they preferred to receive the legally required GMO disclosure information from food companies on GMOs, ranking their choices among six methods. “Symbol or visual representation” was selected as the top method by **51 percent**, followed by “text on a food package” at **29 percent**. Trailing far behind were sending a text message to receive more information (**7 percent**), visiting a website (**6 percent**), calling a phone number (**4 percent**) and scanning an electronic or digital link (**3 percent**).

Various Label Claims Can Impact Consumer Purchases

The survey also seeks to understand how statements about GMOs, or GMO-free claims, stack up against other front-of-pack labels. Several claims rank higher than GMO-free claims. In fact, when given a list to choose from, the top labeling claims consumers seek out when buying food are:

- All Natural, 100% Natural or Natural (**71 percent** when purchasing for themselves, **72 percent** for their families)
- Raised without Antibiotics (**71 percent** for themselves, **72 percent** for their families)
- Sustainable (**62 percent** when purchasing for themselves, **63 percent** for their families)
- Locally Sourced (**61 percent** when purchasing for themselves, **63 percent** for their families)
- USDA Certified Organic (**60 percent** for both themselves and their families)

GMO-free claims including “Not Made with Genetically Modified Ingredients” and “Non-GMO Project Verified” were important to more than 55 percent of consumers each, significantly below any type of natural claim, as well as several others.

However, the presence of a bioengineered logo reduces what consumers would be willing to pay for a product versus one without a logo. For instance, respondents indicated they would be willing to pay an

average of \$2.96 for a container of squash soup with no BE disclosure. But the tolerated price falls when various BE symbols are applied.

Consistent with labeling claims sought by consumers, however, the tolerated price actually rises much closer to that of the unlabeled product if “all natural” or “sustainable” is added to a package alongside the BE symbols. In one case, the tolerated price with a BE disclosure and “all natural” is in fact equal to the product with no BE disclosure.

“Even though consumers have very individualized beliefs about the meaning of many front-of-package claims, it’s clear that ‘natural’ and ‘sustainable’ are powerful motivators for certain consumers,” said [Alexandra Lewin-Zwerdling](#), Vice President, Research and Partnerships, at the IFIC Foundation.

“The IFIC Foundation’s research into specific disclosure logos and text was limited to those proposed by AMS. Clearly this issue is ripe for additional study and education, including qualitative insights that could track actual behavior in the marketplace,” Lewin-Zwerdling added.

The IFIC Foundation [has submitted formal public comments](#) on the proposed labeling schemes, including the full survey, which can be found [here](#).

Methodology

The findings were derived from an online survey of 1,002 Americans ages 18–80 with sole or shared responsibility for their household’s grocery shopping. It was conducted May 18 to 27, 2018, using ResearchNow’s consumer panel. Results were represented and distributed across region, gender, age, education, race/ethnicity and household income.

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