

7 out of 10 consumers don't know what GMOs are, survey says

 fooddive.com/news/7-out-of-10-consumers-dont-know-what-gmos-are-survey-says/538692



Brief

Author

[Cathy Siegner](#)

Published

Oct. 3, 2018

Share it

Dive Brief:

- An online survey of 1,213 U.S. adults conducted for a pro-GMO organization found that 69% aren't confident they understand what genetically modified organisms are, and 32% said they're comfortable having GMOs in their food.
- The survey also found 74% of respondents want to know more about how GMOs affect overall health, and 67% are interested in learning more about their overall safety. In addition, about 43% of consumers think food sold in the U.S. is safe for consumption.
- The entity behind the survey is GMO Answers, an initiative backed by the Council for Biotechnology Information, which includes BASF, Bayer CropScience, Corteva Agriscience and Syngenta. The group said its members "are dedicated to the

responsible development and application of plant biotechnology."

Unlock your growth potential with an ERP

Discover how top food manufacturers are keeping food safety standards high while getting products to market faster and more profitably.

Get the playbook



Dive Insight:

Responses to this online survey indicate a consensus regarding GMOs remains elusive. Seven in 10 participants said they aren't really clear about what GMOs are, and less than a third are comfortable with them in food. Perhaps most significant is that a majority of consumers said they want to know more about the overall health and safety of GMOs.

The pro-and-con GMO debate continues to rage in the U.S., with adequate consumer education often appearing to be the missing link. The confusion doesn't seem to be clearing up, although GMO Answers noted in the survey release that concern and confusion about GMOs "do not equate to rejection." The group also pointed out the survey results are being released soon before the U.S. Department of Agriculture is expected to publish its final guidance on GMO labeling requirements.

Given the continuing divisions of opinion over GMO safety, it's hard to know how food companies, regulators and the government can objectively educate consumers. Scientific studies have tried to provide solid answers, and some have concluded there are no nutritional differences between GMO and non-GMO foods. Meanwhile, anti-GMO groups maintain there still aren't enough credible, independent long-term studies, so the safety of GMOs is unknown, and therefore the smartest thing for consumers to do is avoid them.

That's no easy task because more than 93% of corn and soy in the U.S. is genetically modified, and about 60% to 70% of all processed grocery store products have some GMO ingredients, according to a 2015 story in Vox. Given those statistics, it's doubly hard to see how GMO labels — most likely using the term "BE" for "bioengineered" — will be able to cut through the fog of confusion and give consumers any helpful safety and health information.

Playing into the anti-GMO sentiment is that many people don't like to have natural processes interfered with, and they're skeptical about anything leading in that direction. According to a recent study, consumers continue to say they're "grossed out" by genetically modified food. Another study this year from the Hartman Group showed nearly half of consumers would avoid buying products containing GMOs, while a third don't want to support companies using them. It doesn't help to ease these sentiments that many pro-GMO groups often have some kind of financial or other ties to the biotechnology industry.

A similar debate is taking place in the lab-grown meat sector, where questions have been raised about whether sufficient government regulation has been exercised over its development, safety, content, processes and labeling. It remains to be seen whether the final

agreed-upon oversight — whether from USDA or the Food and Drug Administration, or both — will be sufficient to answer those concerns. However, the oversight is likely to be agreed upon before products come to market. The two agencies are scheduled to hold a joint meeting later this month to decide a number of those and other questions, so it's possible the path forward for these meat products could end up being shorter and easier than it has been for GMOs.

Recommended Reading:

 [GMO Answers Releases New Survey Showing Most Americans Remain Confused About GMOs Despite Overwhelming Health & Safety Consensus Among Experts](#) 

Filed Under: [Manufacturing](#) [Ingredients](#) [Packaging](#) / [Labeling](#) [Policy](#) [Marketing](#)

Top image credit: [Depositphotos](#)