

## **Food Council Survey Finds Continued Support of FDA's Biotech Food Labeling**

Food Insight

Washington, D.C. – Despite public controversy as states debate mandatory labeling of foods produced through biotechnology, a significant majority of consumers support the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) current labeling policy for foods produced using biotechnology, according to the 2014 International Food Information Council (IFIC) [“Consumer Perceptions of Food Technology” Survey](#) [1].

Many also report they are likely to purchase foods produced through biotechnology for certain benefits such as nutrition. The survey has consistently shown for more than 16 years that, when made aware of the health and agronomic benefits of food biotechnology, most Americans are receptive, indicating that accurate information about the technology is important to promoting informed food choices.

### **Labeling**

Americans' general satisfaction with current food labels remains high. Seventy-four percent of consumers could not think of any additional information that they would like added to food labels. Among all survey respondents, 8 percent wanted additional nutritional information, 5 percent wanted more ingredient information, and only 4 percent wanted information about biotechnology or related terms, which is low, especially given how much attention state labeling efforts have received.

Consistent with previous years, nearly two-thirds (63 percent) of consumers support the FDA's current labeling policy for foods produced using biotechnology, which calls for labeling only when biotechnology substantially changes the food's nutritional content or composition, or when a potential safety issue (such as a food allergen) is identified. However, there is a slight increase in consumers indicating opposition to the policy (19 percent) compared to 2012 (14 percent).

“Years of legislation, ballot measures, and mischaracterization of food biotechnology have not affected overall support of FDA's biotech labeling policy,” said IFIC President and CEO David Schmidt. “However, they have likely played a role in the modest increase we're seeing in those who oppose it.”

### **Perceptions of Food Biotechnology**

The majority of Americans, 71 percent, have some awareness of plant biotechnology. Twenty-eight percent are favorable toward plant biotechnology, with significantly more consumers this year (28 percent) reporting being unfavorable than in 2012 (20 percent). However, 43 percent of consumers are neutral or say they don't know enough to form an opinion. Interestingly, Millennials (ages 18-34) have significantly more favorable impressions of food biotechnology – with nearly

four in ten (38 percent) being favorable – compared to one-quarter of consumers ages 35-54 (25 percent) and 55 and older (24 percent).

The majority say they would be likely to purchase foods modified by biotechnology for various nutrition and health-related benefits. Seventy-two percent would be likely to purchase food products made with oils that were modified by biotechnology to provide more healthful fats, such as Omega-3 fatty acids. More than two-thirds of Americans say they would be likely to purchase foods improved with biotechnology to reduce the potential for carcinogens (69 percent), be protected from insect damage and require fewer pesticide applications (69 percent), enhance nutritional benefits (67 percent), and eliminate the trans fat content in foods (67 percent).

### **Modern Agriculture**

More than seven in ten consumers agree that modern agriculture (that is, conventional farming using today's modern tools and equipment) can be sustainable (74 percent), produce high-quality foods (72 percent), and produce nutritious foods (71 percent). More than two-thirds also agree that modern agriculture produces safe foods (68 percent). Slightly more than half agree that modern agriculture farms are still primarily family-run (52 percent), highlighting a lack of awareness of the family-run nature of most of today's small- and large-scale farms.

### **Sustainability**

The 2014 survey found that awareness of sustainability in food production remains relatively high, with 57 percent who have heard or read something about sustainability in food production. Millennials have a higher awareness of sustainability (61 percent) than other age groups.

Only one-quarter (26 percent) of consumers are willing to pay more for foods that fit their perception of sustainability, down from 33 percent in 2012. This number goes up again when looking at Millennials: 43 percent would be willing to pay more for sustainable foods and beverages. However, two-thirds of consumers (66 percent) say it is important that the foods they purchase or consume are produced in a sustainable way (with sustainability being defined as “meeting long-term food needs by producing more food affordably with the same or fewer resources, in a way that is better for the environment and keeps food affordable and accessible for consumers).”

The majority of consumers ranking the following factors of sustainability as important also believe that biotechnology can have a role in: ensuring a sufficient food supply for a growing global population (72 percent), producing more food with less use of natural resources (70 percent), conserving the natural habitat (68 percent), and reducing carbon footprint (68 percent).

“When consumers understand the potential benefits that technology in food production can have for both people and the planet, they can get behind it. People need to know what’s in it for them,” said Marianne Smith Edge, MS, RD, LD, FADA,

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FAND, Senior Vice President of Nutrition and Food Safety at IFIC.

Additional insights from the 2014 “Consumer Perceptions of Food Technology” Survey include:

- Availability of foods produced with biotechnology in the grocery store
- Trusted sources of information on plant/animal biotechnology and sustainability
- Perceptions of animal biotechnology and consumer favorability toward genetically engineered meat, fish, and dairy products
- Comparisons of moms and Millennials to the general population on awareness and perceptions of biotechnology and sustainability

Visit the [Executive Summary](#) [1] for these insights and more at [www.foodinsight.org](http://www.foodinsight.org).

### Methodology

The 16th “Consumer Perceptions of Food Technology” survey was fielded by [Market Strategies International](#) [2] of Livonia, Mich., between March 28 and April 7, 2014, and involved 1,000 U.S. adults polled using an online survey tool. Results were weighted based on gender, age, race, education, region, income, and marital status to reflect the U.S. population. Results can be reported at a 95 percent confidence level. Formerly the “IFIC Survey of Consumer Attitudinal Trends toward Food Biotechnology,” this survey is part of a series that has been conducted since 1997.

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### Links:

[1] <http://www.foodinsight.org/foodtechsurvey.aspx>

[2] <http://www.marketstrategies.com/>