

NOTE: The new Eurobarometer survey of European attitudes to biotech has very good results on public attitudes to GM. See the report at <http://bit.ly/ddGHBF> (pp.36-40)

The survey shows the European public see GM food as not offering benefits, as unsafe, as inequitable and as worrying.

From 1996-2010 the Eurobarometer surveys have found a downward trend in support for GM food in Europe, with strong support now down to just 5%.

In some countries the fall away in support is quite dramatic. In Spain, for example, one of the most pro-GM countries in Europe, where GM maize is grown commercially, in the last 5 years support for GM food fell by 20%.

The survey also shows that even GM supporters are "lukewarm about benefits and safety"!

The Eurobarometer survey also shows equally strong opposition to animal cloning for food, with only 18% supporting this. (pp.41-45)

Eurobarometer - More Europeans opposed to GM food

Greenpeace, November 12 2010

Brussels - According to the new Eurobarometer on Biotechnology [1] the percentage of Europeans opposing genetically modified (GM) food is increasing. "The survey provides EU decision-makers with an unequivocal answer: the majority of Europeans are opposed to the development of GM food in Europe (61%)", said Marco Contiero of Greenpeace. In the previous Eurobarometer addressing GMOs – the 2007 Attitudes of European citizens towards the Environment [2] - the percentage of Europeans opposed to GM food was 58%.

The other key finding of the survey is that, contrary to what proponents of GM crops claim, Europeans know very well the difference between biotechnology and genetic engineering and strongly reject only the latter. Greenpeace as well opposes genetic engineering but not biotechnology as such. Modern biotechnologies such as Marker-Assisted Selection (MAS), a non-invasive process that hugely speeds up conventional breeding processes, alternative to genetic engineering, do not pose the risks of genetic engineering. [3]

Europeans believe that GM food is fundamentally unnatural (70%), is not safe for their health and that of their family (59%), is not safe for future generations (58%), and benefits some people but puts others at risk (57%). Less than a third of those interviewed believes that GM food is good for the economy. The survey also highlights that there is widespread awareness about GM food (84%). "This clearly shows that public opposition to GM food is based on knowledge and choice, not on ignorance as the biotech industry has claimed for years," said Contiero. [4]

This year, over a million Europeans have already signed the first ever citizens' initiative launched by Greenpeace and Avaaz calling for a freeze on new authorisations of GM crops. [5]

Notes to Editor

[1] Special Eurobarometer 341 - 73.1 on Biotechnology.

http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_341_en.pdf

[2] Special Eurobarometer 295- 68.2 Attitudes of European citizens towards the Environment

http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_295_en.pdf

[3] Greenpeace Report: Smart Breeding. A non-invasive biotechnology alternative to genetic engineering of plant varieties:

<http://www.greenpeace.org/international/Global/international/planet-2/report/2009/11/smart-breeding.pdf>

[4] The report specifically states that 63% of Europeans who have heard of GM food voice concern about the health effects of GM food compared to only 44% of those who had not heard of GM food prior to the survey. Overall, 64% of European respondents who have heard of GM food consider that its development should not be encouraged compared to 45% who had not heard of it.

[5] The petition is the first-ever to come under the European citizens' initiative, a principle enshrined in EU treaties that allows one million European citizens to formally request that the Commission legislate in accordance with their demands. This citizens' initiative is still running and Greenpeace and Avaaz have requested a personal handover to Commission President José Manuel Barroso in Brussels in the coming weeks. To sign the one million citizens' initiative calling for a GM freeze, go to: <http://www.greenpeace.org/gepetition>

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