

## Poll: An appetite for labeling genetically modified foods

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In this Oct. 23, 2014 file photo, a grocery store employee wipes down a soup bar with a display informing customers of organic, GMO-free oils, in Boulder, Colo. A large majority of Americans support labeling of genetically modified foods, whether they care about eating them or not. According to a December Associated Press-GfK poll, 66 percent of Americans favor requiring food manufacturers to put labels on products that contain genetically modified organisms, or foods grown from seeds engineered in labs. Only seven percent are opposed to the idea, and 24 percent are neutral. (AP Photo/Brennan Linsley, File)

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According to a December Associated Press-GfK poll, 66 percent of Americans favor requiring food manufacturers to put labels on products that contain genetically modified organisms, or foods grown from seeds engineered in labs. Only 7 percent are opposed to the idea, and 24 percent are neutral.

Fewer Americans say genetically modified ingredients are important to them when judging whether a food is healthy. About 4 in 10 said the presence of such ingredients was very or extremely important to them.

That's higher than the share who say it's important to know whether a food is organic, and about on par with the share saying they consider the amount of protein in a food an important factor.

For some, the debate over GMOs is about the food system overall. Andrew Chan of Seattle said he strongly favors labeling genetically modified ingredients, but those ingredients themselves aren't most important to him. As a parent, he said his top concern is the abundance of processed foods.

"GMO ingredients aren't the number one thing, but more than likely within a processed food I'd find something that is a genetically modified product," said Chan, 41.

Genetically modified seeds are engineered to have certain traits, such as resistance to herbicides or certain plant diseases. Most of the country's corn and soybean crop is now genetically modified, with much of that becoming animal feed. Modified corn and soybeans are also made into popular processed food ingredients such as corn oil, corn starch, high-fructose corn syrup and soybean oil.

Currently, the Food and Drug Administration doesn't require labeling of genetically modified foods, saying those on the market are safe. Consumer advocates backing labeling say shoppers have a right to know what is in their food, arguing not enough is known about their effects.

The AP-GfK poll comes as several states have weighed in on the issue. Vermont became the first state to require labels for genetically modified foods last year, passing a law in May that will take effect mid-2016 if it survives legal challenges. Maine and Connecticut passed laws before Vermont, but those measures don't take effect unless neighboring states follow suit. Ballot initiatives to require labeling were narrowly defeated in California, Washington and Oregon in recent years.

The food industry and seed companies have aggressively fought attempts to force labeling, and have pushed a bill in Congress that would block those efforts. The bill by Rep. Mike Pompeo, R-Kansas, would reaffirm that such food labels are voluntary, overriding any state laws that require them.

In a December congressional hearing on the issue, members of both parties were less inclined than the public to support labeling. Many questioned whether mandatory GMO labels would be misleading to consumers since there is little scientific evidence that such foods are unsafe.

According to the AP-GfK poll, public support for labeling GMOs was bipartisan, with 71 percent of Democrats and 64 percent of Republicans favoring labeling. Even among conservative Republicans, more than 6 in 10 favor a labeling requirement.

Jay Jaffe, a Republican from Philadelphia, says he strongly favors labeling even though he has no problem buying GMOs. "If they are cheaper and they taste right to me, I'll buy it," he says.

Still, he thinks there should be accountability in the food industry. "It should be there and not in small print," he said of GMO labels. "People should be able to make a choice."

Lucinda Morel, an independent who leans Democratic from Los Angeles, says she is very conscious of ingredients as a mother of three young children. She strongly favors labeling GMO foods.

Morel said she is concerned that so many foods have become modified "before we can see any ramifications or any fallout, if there is any, from making such changes so quickly."

The food industry has faced pressure from retailers as consumer awareness of GMOs has increased. The retailer Whole Foods plans to label GMO products in all its U.S. and Canadian stores by 2018. And some companies have decided to remove the ingredients altogether.

The AP-GfK Poll of 1,010 adults was conducted online Dec. 4-8, using a sample drawn from GfK's probability-based KnowledgePanel, which is designed to be representative of the U.S. population. The margin of sampling error for all respondents is plus or minus 3.4 percentage points.

Respondents were first selected randomly using phone or mail survey methods, and later interviewed online. People selected for KnowledgePanel who didn't otherwise have access to the Internet were provided access at no cost to them.

**More information:** AP-GfK Poll: [www.ap-gfkpoll.com](http://www.ap-gfkpoll.com)

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