

Five things: Many back labeling of genetically modified foods

January 13 2015, by Mary Clare Jalonick



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)

Two thirds of Americans support labeling of genetically modified ingredients on food packages, even if they may not read them, according to an Associated Press-GfK poll.

Fewer Americans say [genetically modified ingredients](#) are important in judging whether a [food](#) is healthy. About 4 in 10 said the presence of such ingredients was very or extremely important.

"If they are cheaper and they taste right to me, I'll buy it," says Jay Jaffe, of Philadelphia, who strongly supports [labeling](#).

Five things to know about Americans' support for labeling of genetically modified ingredients:

IT'S ABOUT MORE THAN JUST GMOs

Genetically modified organisms are foods grown from seeds engineered in labs. Jaffe says he has no problem buying GMOs, but 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."

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](#) and says 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.

FEW OPPOSE LABELING

According to the December AP-GfK poll, 66 percent of Americans favor requiring food manufacturers to put labels on products that contain genetically modified ingredients.

Only 7 percent are opposed to the labeling, and 24 percent are neutral.

Of those who say it is only moderately important to them if a food contains genetically modified ingredients, 68 percent still favor labeling.

And of those who say it isn't important to them whether a food contains genetically modified ingredients, only 20 percent oppose a labeling requirement. Half of those people are neutral.

SUPPORT CUTS ACROSS GROUPS

Public support for labeling GMOs was bipartisan, with 71 percent of Democrats and 64 percent of Republicans favoring labeling. Among conservative Republicans, more than 6 in 10 favor a labeling requirement.

Fifty-six percent of Americans under 30 favor a labeling requirement—the lowest of any age group. Among that age group, 8 percent oppose labeling, though, with most of the remainder saying they

are neutral.

STATE LABELING EFFORTS ARE MIXED

Despite the wide public support, many state efforts have faltered as the food industry and seed companies like Monsanto have aggressively fought attempts to force labeling. Ballot initiatives to require labeling were narrowly defeated in California, Washington and Oregon in recent years.

Vermont became the first state to require labels for genetically modified foods last year, passing a law in May that will take effect in 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.

CONGRESS MAY WEIGH IN

The [food industry](#) has pushed a bill in Congress that would block the state 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.

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.

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