

GM free labelling: Exploring public responses to the labelling of GM food and the use of GM-free labelling

Area of research interest: [Novel and non-traditional foods, additives and processes](#)

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Conducted by: Define Insight Ltd.

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Background

Some EU countries have introduced schemes to allow producers to label products as 'GM-free' or 'without GM', although the rules of these schemes tolerate some GM materials (low level adventitious presence, use of certain GM additives etc.) and the products that carry these labels do not need to be completely free from the use of biotechnology. The European Commission is currently considering whether to harmonise these national schemes across Europe. This topic is likely to be discussed at EU level in early 2013 when the results of a Europe wide review will be available. Our research explored UK consumer responses to GM labelling and their views on 'GM-free' labelling schemes.

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Research Approach

The overall aim of this research was to explore UK public views on the labelling of GM on food and options for labelling food as GM free. Specific research questions included awareness of current practice and response to current practice, how the public think GM food should be labelled and views on the use of GM free labelling and the labelling of products from animals fed GM feed. The research will also explore how views differ amongst the population, according to the type of food.

This research used qualitative methodology in order to explore the breadth of the public's views on this topic and to ensure sufficient opportunity to gather views from those who are less engaged on the topic. Following the outcome of the qualitative research quantitative data was collected in response to selected questions via an omnibus survey.

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Results

This research explored UK consumer responses to GM labelling and their views on various approaches to GM labelling, including "GM-free". The results from this research will: (1) inform UK policy on the use of 'GM free' labelling and (2) ensure that the UK public's views are reflected in our future discussions at EU level on GM labelling issues.

Key findings include:

- Overall there was low awareness of any existing labelling of GM foods amongst study participants . Participants were typically not seeking information or labelling with regard to GM foods. This is reflected in the quantitative findings where only 2% of participants spontaneously mentioned they looked for information about GM content when buying food for the first time.
- Participants were divided between those that felt the ideal labelling solution should be to highlight the presence or absence of GM material. However, information regarding GM presence tended to be considered more important, meeting participants 'right to know'.
- Labelling of foods to indicate the absence of GM ingredients may result in a range of expectations. For example, there were assumptions amongst participants that a product labelled as 'GM-Free' would not allow for any tolerance threshold (such as the 0.9% tolerance level that was generally accepted for mandatory GM labelling). This was confirmed by the quantitative research where 68% of respondents who had heard of the use of GM supported this view.
- Although there was low or no awareness of current GM labelling requirements, there was a strong assumption amongst participants that products containing GM ingredients would be regulated and labelled.
- Participants were also generally unaware of the use of GM animal feed by farmers. Once made aware of its use they typically considered that products from animals fed GM feed should be labelled, consistent with our previous research:

[Public attitudes to GM food](#)

- Although a range of knowledge of GM existed amongst participants, attitudes towards it were fairly undeveloped and knowledge levels were quite low overall. This low level of understanding appears to be supported by the quantitative research, where only 8% of respondents that had heard of the use of GM claimed to have good knowledge of the use of GM in food or food production.

Research report

England, Northern Ireland and Wales

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