

UK consumers give their views on genome edited food

The project sought feedback from members of the public on their perceptions of genome edited (GE) food and its potential future labelling.

The research highlighted low participant awareness of GE and its difference to GM, and the need to educate the public on GE technology for use in foods.

Some participants felt regulation and transparent labelling of GE foods would be important, should they reach the UK market.

GE is the term given to a wide range of techniques used to alter the DNA of organisms, including plants and animals – adding, deleting or replacing DNA sections. However, this research particularly focused on one specific sub-set of GE foods, where outcomes may otherwise have been produced using traditional breeding.

Using such GE techniques mean changes can be made more quickly and precisely. Potential uses include making small changes to DNA to improve traits in an organism, like the nutritional content of crops or their resistance to disease.

There are currently no genome edited foods authorised for sale in the UK, although some are available elsewhere in the world and GE is a rapidly-growing technology within the global food system.

In January 2021, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) launched a consultation into the future regulation of genetic technologies in England, including inviting responses on a proposal to remove GE regulation from wider GM regulation. The responses are due to be published soon.

Today's report, carried out by Ipsos MORI, involved members of the public across England, Wales and Northern Ireland in online workshops and activities, followed by a representative survey of over 2,000 consumers.

Following the UK's departure from the EU, the FSA and Food Standards Scotland (FSS) are now responsible for all safety assessments of GM food and feed, as well as accompanying labelling rules.

Professor Robin May, FSA Chief Scientific Adviser, said:

“We welcome the findings of this important consumer research project, which will help the FSA as we continue to build an evidence base to inform future food policy, safety advice and labelling requirements in this fast-moving area.

“Our priority is to represent and protect the consumer, and so it is vital that we continue to work closely with the public, as well as embarking on other cutting-edge research initiatives, to ensure we use the most robust evidence in order to act in consumers' interests.

“The UK prides itself on having the very highest standards of food safety, and there are strict controls on GM crops, seeds and food which we at the FSA will continue to apply moving forward. We will continue to work closely with a wide range of partners to develop our future regulatory approach in this area in response to these views and the forthcoming publication of findings from the consultation led by Defra.”

Later this summer, the FSA will also publish a report which assesses different international regulatory approaches to GM and novel foods.

For more information on GE, including an ‘FSA Explains’ video, visit our dedicated [GE webpage](#).

The [full consumer research project](#) is available on our research pages.