

GMOs: Who cares?

The use of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) in food has been adopted faster than any other technology in the history of agriculture. It is a rare adult who has not eaten genetically modified food, as this biotechnology is now in wide use. Lagging behind its embrace by the agriculture industry, however, is solid understanding and support on the part of consumers. Research on consumer attitudes and awareness of GMOs has occurred for well over a decade. In Vermont, the Center for Rural Studies produces a yearly poll gathering data from Vermonters on a variety of subjects, occasionally including GMOs. The 2012 Vermonter Poll asked respondents about their awareness, attitudes, and information seeking regarding the technology. Using data gathered from this survey, this report provides an update to the literature addressing consumer awareness of and attitudes about GMOs. It specifically provides information about Vermont consumers and offers a comparison against previously published results of the 2006 Vermonter Poll. The results indicate a generally high level of awareness of the technology, interest in information about them, and nuanced attitudes. Specifically, the use of GMOs for medical applications shared nearly equal support and opposition, with the largest portion of respondents either neutral or unsure. For use in meat, commercial food, and vegetables, however, a majority expressed opposition. Despite such public opinions, there are currently no laws limiting application of this technology in the food system. However, with support from Vermonter Poll results, the Vermont legislature is currently considering two bills regarding GMO labeling.