German consumers skeptical of gene technology

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Findings of a GfK survey on gene technologyÂ Â

Nuremberg, February 16, 2007 â€“ Genetically modified food products are not accepted by German consumers. Many of the subjects surveyed also believed that the current mandatory labeling regulations for genetically modified foods should be improved or are inadequate. However, the use of genetic technology in non-food products is regarded with much less skepticism by consumers. These are the findings of a GfK Marktforschung survey carried out in December 2006 on the attitudes and habits of Germans to gene technology.

In general, four out of ten subjects surveyed were against the use of gene technology in medicine, plant pesticides and fertilizers and foods, as well as in everyday products such as cosmetics and detergents. Only 4.9% of German consumers were found to be principally in favor of gene technology.

High level of rejection in the food sector

Consumers are generally skeptical of the use of gene technology in food products: 74.9% of consumers surveyed rejected the development and introduction of genetically modified foods as a matter of principle. At 6.7%, the number of protagonists was very low, with 18.3% indifferent to the subject.

85.5% of interviewees rejected animal products including sausage, ham and meat if these originated from animals which had been directly subjected to genetic modification, or had been indirectly affected by genetically modified feedstock. 77.7% of German consumers said they rejected genetically modified fruit and vegetables, with 75.9% rejecting dairy products like milk, cheese and yoghurt and 73.7% refusing genetically modified bread. At the other end of the scale come beverages, with a 45.1% rejection level.

The use of gene technology or genetically modified substances in fruit and vegetables was accepted by 8.1%, which represents the highest factor in the food sector. For both meat and dairy products, 4.8% found gene technology acceptable, and for bread, the figure was 2.8%, with 1.5% finding genetically modified beverages acceptable.

Mandatory labeling needs to be improved

Consumers are equally skeptical of the mandatory labeling regulations applying to genetically modified foods in their present form: 72.4% regard the regulations as needing improvement or inadequate. 22.8% of Germans are of the opinion that the current regulations are adequate, while 2.1% believe these are excessive.

Less skepticism for pesticides, fertilizers and medicine

Markedly fewer Germans reject the use of gene technology in non-food sectors: for medicine, 10.7% were against its use in vaccinations and inoculations and 10.2% rejected gene technology for other medical products, such as insulin. On the issue of fertilizers, 3.4% of the survey subjects rejected gene technology, although for insecticides and weed killers, the figure was only 2.1%.

Compared to the food sector, the number of protagonists is higher here. With a figure of 29.9%, the maximum level of acceptance of gene technology was recorded for insecticides and weed killers, followed by fertilizers at 18.7%. For vaccinations and inoculations, the level of acceptance totaled 18.1% and for other medical products 16.9%.

The survey

The findings come from a GfK Marktforschung survey on genetic technology carried out in December 2006. In the context of the survey, 1,023 consumer interviews were conducted with subjects aged 16 years and over. In addition to general attitudes to gene technology, acceptance or rejection of specific products and assessment of the current mandatory labeling regulations, the survey covered other subject areas. Also included was an assessment of the relevant info rmation material available, as well as the general propensity to buy genetically modified products, the specific propensity taking into account the prices compared with traditionally produced foods and preferences relating to genetically modified versus naturally made products. The researchers had already surveyed German consumers in a first survey wave carried out in 1996.

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