

CANADIAN AWARENESS AND PERCEPTIONS OF GENETICALLY MODIFIED FOODS

-- Eight in ten Canadians (78%) aware of issue --

-- Canadians perceive higher yields in food production to be a benefit of genetically modified foods, but cite health and food safety concerns as possible risks --

-- Seven in ten (68%) would be less likely to buy a food product if they knew it contained genetically modified ingredients --



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This press release is based on two surveys.

The first is based on the Canadian results from an international public opinion survey of 8 countries, conducted by the Angus Reid Group. A sample of 500 Canadian adults were surveyed by telephone, from November 23 to December 5, 1999. With a national sample of 500, one can say with 95 percent certainty that the results are within ± 4.4 percentage points of what they would have been had the entire adult Canadian population been polled. Please note that the margin of error increases when smaller sub-samples are examined.

Where applicable, the Canadian results from the international survey are compared to an earlier Canada-only public opinion survey conducted by the Angus Reid Group. For this earlier poll, a sample of 1,500 Canadian adults were surveyed by telephone, from September 7 to September 12, 1999. The data from the 1,500 interviews were weighted to reflect the regional and age/sex composition of the actual Canadian adult population, according to the 1996 Census data. With a national sample of 1,500, one can say with 95 percent certainty that the results are within ± 2.5 percentage points of what they would have been had the entire adult Canadian population been polled. Please note that the margin of error increases when smaller sub-samples are examined.

CANADIAN AWARENESS AND PERCEPTIONS OF GENETICALLY MODIFIED FOODS

- Most Canadians (78%) aware of issue --**
 - Canadians perceive higher yields in food production to be a benefit of genetically modified foods, but cite health and food safety concerns as possible risks --**
 - Seven in ten (68%) would be less likely to buy a food product if they knew it contained genetically modified ingredients --**
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This press release is based on the Canadian results from an international Angus Reid Group survey of 8 countries. A sample of 500 Canadian adults was surveyed from November 23 to December 5, 1999, yielding a maximum margin of error of ± 4.4 percentage points (19 times out of 20).

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Eight in ten (78%) Canadians aware of genetically modified foods

- ◆ Eight in ten (78%) Canadians have “seen, read or heard” something about genetically modified foods. Half (49%) of Canadian adults say they have heard “a little” about the issue, while three in ten (29%) say they have heard “a lot”. [Table 1]
- ◆ Awareness of genetically modified foods increases with education and household income. Eighty-five percent of Canadians in the highest income category (\$60K+) are aware of genetically modified foods, compared to two-thirds (66%) of those in the lowest income category (<\$30K). Furthermore, nine in ten (90%) Canadians with university degrees are aware of the issue, compared to seven in ten (69%) with high school education or less. [Table 1]

- ◆ A comparison of these results from a November/December 1999 poll, to an earlier Canadian poll in September 1999, shows that awareness of genetically modified foods in Canada has increased. In September 1999, less than two-thirds (64%) of Canadian adults said they had “seen, read or heard” of the genetically modified foods issue (vs. 78% in November/December). Canadians are also more likely to say they knew “a lot” about genetically modified foods in November/December (29%), as compared to September (19%). [Table 3]

"Higher Yield" Most Commonly Perceived Benefit of Genetically Modified Foods

- ◆ Among Canadians aware of genetically modified foods, the most frequently named is “higher yields / productivity / improved efficiency” in food production (29% of those aware of the issue). Other benefits mentioned include “less pesticides required” (18%), “better quality of food” (17%), and “improved nutritional value / healthier [foods]” (10%). [Table 4]
- ◆ One-quarter (24%) of Canadians who are aware of the issue do not believe there are any benefits to genetically modified foods, and another 11 percent are unsure of any benefits these foods provide. [Table 4]
- ◆ Among those aware of the issue, older Canadians (55 +) are “more likely” (31%) to believe that there are no benefits to genetically modified food as compared to 23 percent of those 35 to 54 years of age, and 18 percent of those 18 to 34 years of age. [Table 6]
- ◆ Among those aware of the issue, less affluent Canadians (<\$30K) are also more likely (37%) to believe that there are no advantages to genetic modification, compared to 24 percent of middle-income (\$30K to \$60K) and 15 percent of the more affluent (\$60K+). [Table 6]

"Health Concerns" Most Commonly Perceived Risk of Genetically Modified Foods

- ◆ Among Canadians aware of genetically modified foods, the most frequently named risks associated with these foods involve concerns of “food safety / health concerns / allergies” (32% of those aware of the issue), and the experimental nature and unknown impact of genetically modified foods (29%). One in ten (11%) Canadians are also concerned about the possibility of a “virus / mutation”. [Table 5]
- ◆ One in ten (9%) Canadians who are aware of the issue believe that there are no disadvantages of genetically modified foods, with another 14 percent unsure of any possible risks. There are no statistically significant differences across demographic groups among for those who do not believe there are any disadvantages. [Tables 5 and 6]

Canadians More Aware of Risks than Benefits

- ◆ Canadians tend to know more about the risks associated with genetically modified foods than the benefits. One-quarter (24%) of respondents with knowledge of the issue, believe that there are no advantages to genetic modification, compared to one in ten (9%) who believe that there are no risks. [Table 6]
- ◆ Furthermore, among those aware of the issue, more than three-quarters (77%) of Canadians were able to name a possible risk of genetically modified foods, versus two-thirds (65%) who were able to name a benefit. [Table 7]

Most Canadians Say They Would Be Less Likely to Buy Foods That Are Genetically Modified

- ◆ Among Canadians aware of genetically modified foods, seven in ten (68%) indicate they would be “less likely” to purchase a food product if they knew it contained genetically modified ingredients. Four in ten (43%) say they would be "much less likely" to buy genetically modified foods, while one-quarter (25%) of Canadians say they would be "somewhat less likely" to make the purchase. [Table 8]
- ◆ Four percent of Canadians aware of genetically modified food would be "somewhat more likely" to purchase a food product that contains genetically modified ingredients where less than 1 percent say they would be "much more likely" to make the purchase. [Table 8]
- ◆ Three in ten (28%) Canadians aware of genetically modified foods say that the presence of genetically modified ingredients would have no influence on their decision to purchase the product. [Table 8]
- ◆ Among those aware of the issue, women (73%) are more likely than men (61%) to say they would not buy a genetically modified food product. [Table 8]

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For further information about this poll, please contact:

Gary Bennewies
President and Chief Operating Officer
Canadian Market Research Operations
Angus Reid Group
(204) 949-3100

Joanna Karman
Senior Vice President
AgriFood
Angus Reid Group
(204) 949-3100

Additional information can be found at:

The Angus Reid Group Website (www.angusreid.com)

