

International Food Information Council

2008 Food Biotechnology:

A Study of US Consumer Trends





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Executive Summary

The 2008 *Food Biotechnology: A Study of US Consumer Trends* Survey, commissioned by the International Food Information Council, is the 13th annual nationally representative survey designed to gain insights into consumer perspectives on food biotechnology. This research provides the opportunity to track public awareness and perceptions of plant and animal biotechnology, determine confidence in the U.S. food supply and understand attitudes about food labeling, determine consumer opinions regarding potential benefits associated with biotechnology, and uncover emerging opinions on sustainable food production.

This survey has again found that biotech foods do not make the top-of-mind list of things Americans are avoiding. In addition, awareness of food biotechnology continues to correlate with favorability. Therefore, the need for communication of credible, science-based information about food biotechnology remains strong.

Also, the likelihood to purchase biotech foods for special benefits remains high and stable. Across the board, awareness of these benefits drives favorability.

Methodology

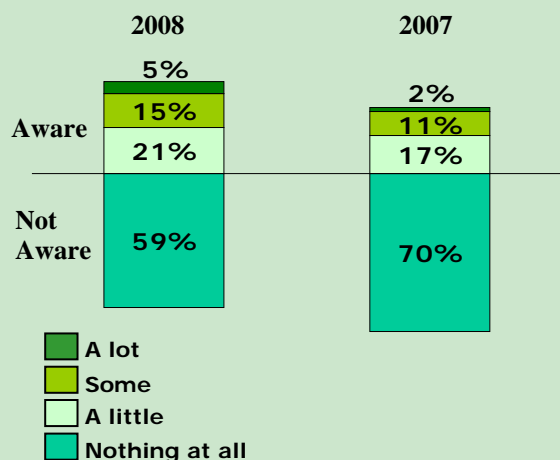
The International Food Information Council commissioned Cogent Research to conduct the 13th in a series of quantitative assessments of consumer attitudes toward food biotechnology. One thousand adults living in the U.S. were surveyed from July 29th through August 18th, 2008. The survey data were weighted against the latest U.S. Census projections on education and marital status to ensure the final results were nationally representative.

Confidence in the Food Supply →

Despite continuing media attention and focus on food concerns, consumers' overall confidence in the U.S. food supply remains high at 68 percent.

Although overall confidence is high, the percentage that is "very confident" has eroded compared to 2006 from 21 percent to 18 percent. Further, the percentage of those who are "not at all confident" in the food supply, while small, has increased from 0 percent in 2006 to 3 percent in 2008. When asked about specific food safety concerns, disease and contamination continue to top the list - with half of Americans citing this as top-of-mind. This compares with 1 percent of respondents listing biotechnology as a top-of-mind issue.

Awareness of Sustainable Food Production



Percent that mention concern with each food safety issue:		
	2008	2007
Disease/ contamination	50%	38%
Handling/ preparation	29%	31%
Food sources	13%	20%
Health/ nutrition	8%	8%
Agricultural production	7%	8%
Preservatives/ chemicals	6%	9%
Packaging/ labeling	3%	5%
Biotech	1%	1%
Processed foods	1%	1%
Others	2%	4%

← Sustainability

Awareness of sustainable food production has increased from 2007; however the majority of consumers are still not familiar with the concept.

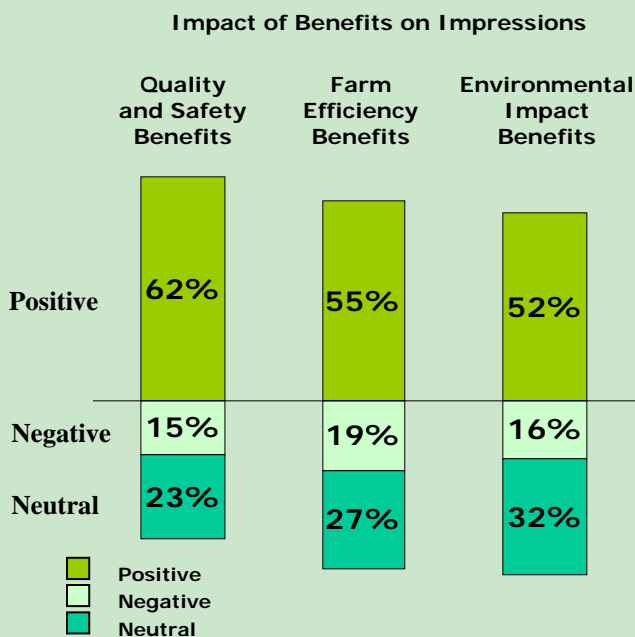
This year's survey marks the second year we asked consumers about their perceptions of sustainability. Last year 70 percent had heard "nothing at all" about sustainable food production, whereas, this year significantly more consumers are aware of this concept.

Overall, 5 percent of consumers have heard “a lot” about sustainable food production, 15 percent “some,” and 21 percent “a little.” The majority of consumers, 59 percent, continue to report they are not familiar with the concept.

Consumers were asked to rank factors related to growing crops in a sustainable manner, in order of importance to them. “Growing more food to help feed the growing population” was the most important factor, with 33 percent of consumers ranking it first. “Reducing the amount of pesticides needed to produce food” came in second with 28 percent ranking it first. These were followed by “growing more food on less land so valuable land like rain forests is not needed as growing space for increased food production” (19 percent ranked first), “conserving fresh water through plants that use water more efficiently” (12 percent ranked first), and “reducing green house gas emissions through no-till farming methods” (8 percent ranked first).

Animal Biotechnology

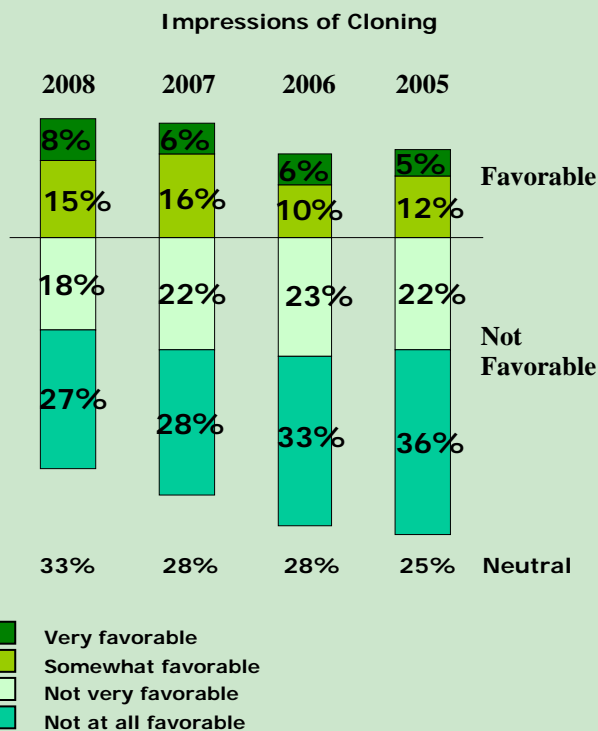
The majority of Americans (55 percent) have neutral impressions of animal biotechnology. Potential benefits of animal biotechnology have a positive impact on their impressions.



Overall, 55 percent of Americans have neutral impressions of animal biotechnology; 22 percent are favorable and 23 percent not favorable. Specific benefits had a positive impact on impressions. 62 percent stated that safety and quality benefits (for example, improved animal health or improved nutritional quality) associated with animal biotech have a positive impact on their impression.

Relative to 2006, significantly more consumers (55 percent) were positively impressed by animal biotech’s role in farm efficiency, following the positive trend from the previous two years. Finally, more than half (52 percent) say that animal biotech’s ability to lessen the environmental impact of animal waste has a positive impression on them, up significantly from 2005 (44 percent).

Both the number of favorable impressions and neutral impressions of cloning have increased significantly, compared to 2005 and prior years, corresponding with a decrease in negative impressions. Cloning was defined as a form of animal biotechnology that retains desirable traits by producing an animal that is an identical twin.



Although many Americans (45 percent) continue to hold “not favorable” impressions of cloning, this number has decreased relative to 2005 (58 percent). Meanwhile, consumers holding “neutral” impressions (33 percent) and “favorable” impressions (23 percent) have increased relative to 2005. Since fielding the 2007 survey, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) completed its risk assessment on animal cloning, concluding meat and milk from cow, pig and goat clones and their offspring are safe. The percentage of consumers “likely” to purchase meat and milk from cloned animals given the FDA’s safety determination has increased to 48 percent in 2008 from 36 percent in 2005, when the question was asked hypothetically. Meanwhile the percentage of those “not at all likely” has decreased to 26 percent in 2008 from 35 percent in 2005.

A similar softening of impressions can be seen with foods from genetically engineered animals. Genetic engineering was defined as a form of animal biotechnology that allows us to move beneficial traits from one animal to another in a precise way. Significantly more Americans (38 percent) reported neutral impressions of genetic engineering than in 2006 (31 percent).

Additionally, those not at all favorable have decreased from 19 percent in 2005 to 11 percent in 2008. Overall, 34 percent of Americans hold favorable impressions of genetic engineering and 34 percent are not favorable. When asked hypothetically, if the FDA determined meat and milk from genetically engineered animals were safe, how likely they would be to purchase these products, 65 percent said they would be likely and 35 percent said they would not be likely.

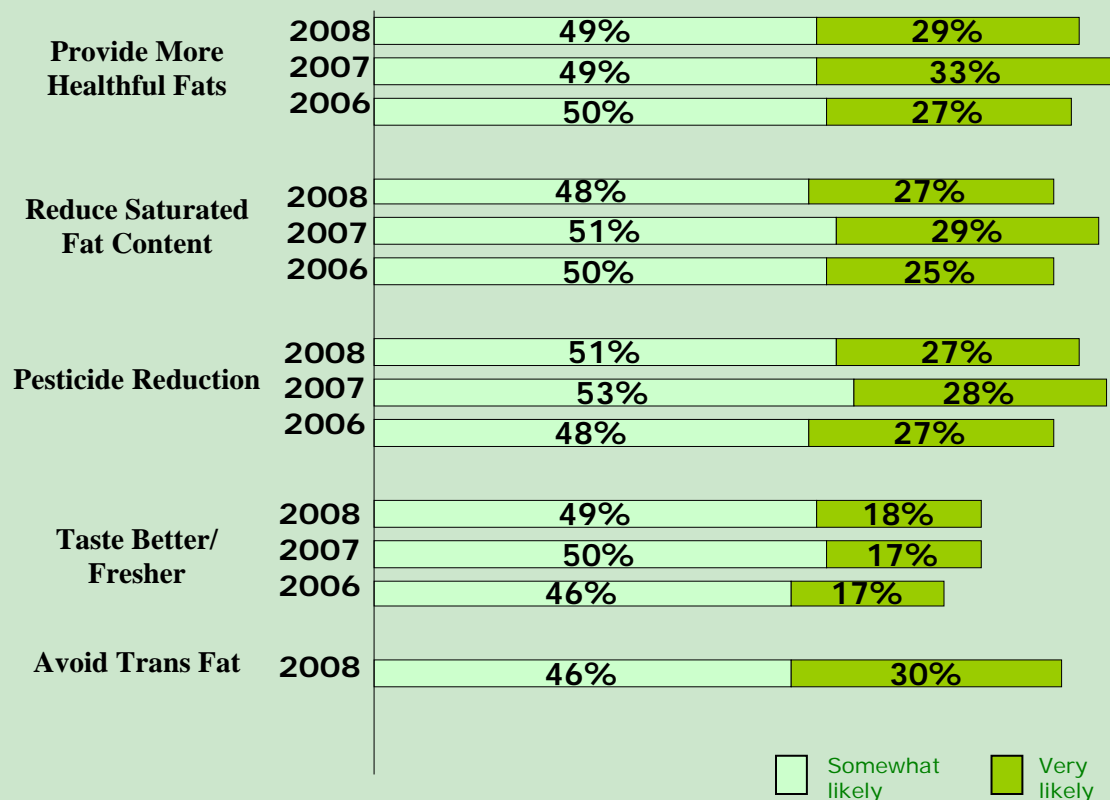
Plant Biotechnology

The majority of Americans would be likely to purchase foods from plants produced through biotechnology for specific benefits.

Awareness and perceptions of plant biotechnology are stable, with concerns about usage in food production low. The majority (53 percent) of consumers continue to have neutral impressions of plant biotechnology, with 31 percent holding favorable impressions. The majority would be likely to purchase biotech foods for specific benefits; and the belief that biotechnology will provide benefits within the next five years is correlated with likelihood of purchasing these foods. The majority of Americans (53 percent) did not know if biotechnology would provide benefits in the next five years. Those who did have an opinion were almost twice as likely to believe it would provide benefits (30 percent) than not provide benefits (17 percent).

Consumers are most likely to purchase foods produced through biotechnology that provide more healthful fats like Omega-3 and that require fewer pesticide applications, each with 78 percent likely to purchase. Following closely are foods produced through biotechnology to reduce trans fat at 76 percent and to reduce saturated fat at 75 percent. Finally, 67 percent responded they would be likely to purchase foods produced through biotechnology to taste better or fresher.

Likely to Purchase Biotech Foods For Specific Benefits



Food Labeling →

Satisfaction with current food labels remains high, with only 14 percent of Americans able to think of information they would like to see added to food labels.

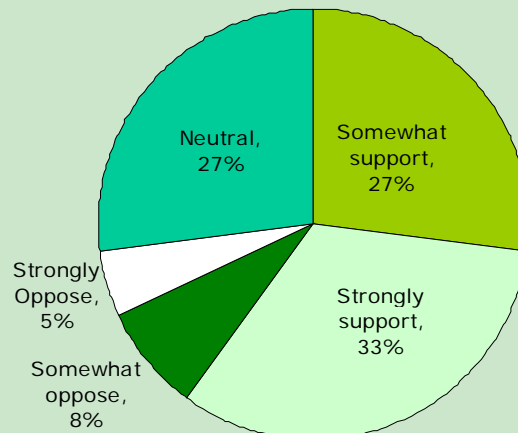
Significantly fewer Americans (14 percent) can think of information they would like to see added to food labels relative to 2005 and 2004. Those mentioning a desire to see foods produced through biotechnology labeled remains at less than 1 percent. In addition, the majority of Americans (60 percent) support the Food and Drug Administration's labeling policy, which requires special labeling only when biotechnology's use introduces an allergen or when it substantially changes the food's nutritional content.

Plant-made Pharmaceuticals

The majority of consumers (50 percent) continue to hold neutral opinions about using biotechnology to produce medicines from food crops.

Consistent with previous trends, almost half (46 percent) of consumers have heard or read at least "a little" about using biotechnology to produce medicines from special varieties of crops.

Position on FDA Biotech Labeling Requirements



Consumers are significantly less likely to be "somewhat favorable" towards PMPs relative to last year (27 percent down from 32 percent in 2007), and are more likely to be "not very favorable" (6 percent up from 3 percent in 2007). However, those who have an impression are still more than four times as likely to have a favorable impression (41 percent) than a not favorable one (9 percent).

For More Information:

For an electronic copy of this report and the full data tables, please visit the IFIC Web site at: <http://www.ific.org>



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