



Food Biotechnology: Consumer perceptions of food biotechnology

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS FOR INDIA

ASIAN FOOD INFORMATION CENTRE (AFIC)

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Food Biotechnology: Consumer perceptions of food biotechnology In India

The Asian Food Information Centre 2008 consumer survey

INTRODUCTION

Genetically modified foods will most likely become an increasing feature of the Asian diet in light of the region's growing demand for high volumes of quality food. The Asian Food Information Centre (AFIC) conducted this consumer research to provide insights on how consumers in Asia perceive the use of biotechnology to produce foods and how likely consumers are to accept the various benefits biotechnology derived foods may bring. The surveyed were conducted in 5 major cities in 5 different countries included Beijing, New Delhi, Manila, Seoul and Tokyo.

This summary report focused on individual country findings - India. The other country findings will be released soon. For Food Biotechnology: Consumer perceptions of food biotechnology in Asia, please visit www.afic.org.

The purpose of this consumer research is to:

- Understand attitudes about confidence in the safety of the food supply and food labeling
- Identify concerns related to foods that have been produced using food biotechnology within the context of broader food safety and labeling issues
- Track public awareness and perceptions of food biotechnology
- Measure the extent to which direct consumer benefits of food biotechnology resonate with the public
- Uncover emerging opinions on 'sustainable food production'

METHODOLOGY

AFIC commissioned The Nielsen Company Research to conduct a quantitative assessment of consumer attitudes toward food biotechnology. The research was conducted via an on-line survey of 1007 adults, aged 18-64, and living in 5 major cities in 5 different countries – China, India, Japan, the Philippines and South Korea.

The number of respondents for New Delhi n= 204. Quotas were set to best reflect the demographic population in the cities.

The survey took place from 15th July to 15th August 2008. Respondents could chose between an English language questionnaire and a version translated into the local language.

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS FOR INDIA

The study was divided into 3 parts: consumer attitudes towards food safety and food labeling, consumers' awareness and attitudes towards food biotechnology in general and consumer attitudes towards 'direct consumer benefits' of food biotechnology.

Confidence in the safety of the food supply

Consumers in India are generally confident with the food safety. Handling/preparation and artificial ingredients/additives are the top list of food safety concerns.

In India, 19% of consumers say 'very confident' with the food safety level. More than 60% say reported to be rather/very confident.

Spontaneous concerns mentioned about safety issues related to foods, in India, consumers mentioned 'Inaccurate label' and 'Hygiene' are the most concerned in food safety (19%), followed by 'Used of low quality ingredients' (15%). Food biotechnology was not mentioned spontaneously as a concern.

When asked to rank specific food safety concerns, 25% of Indian consumers say handling/ preparation are the most concerned, followed by artificial ingredients/ additives at 23%, while food biotechnology was not mentioned as a concern.

At the prompted level, consumers were then shown a list of possible food safety issues and asked how concerned they were with each. Among the five countries including India, food poisoning, pesticide residues, food additives and unknown source of food were highlighted by consumers in all countries. But Food biotechnology was not indicated as a safety concern in India.

Indian consumers seem to be alert on the food they consume with 44% claiming to avoid or eat less of certain foods: fatty/oily food ranks highest on the list of foods consumers avoid. Biotech foods do not make the list of things consumers in India avoid.

Food labeling

Reading food label seem to be standard practice for consumer in India. Expiry date, food additives and vitamin contents are information they are looking for. Presence of biotechnology-derived ingredients is not a labeling demand.

To better understand the importance of information on food labels, respondents were questioned about their use of food labels as a source of information on nutrition and food safety. India consumers, reading food labels seem to be standard practice, 41% say they read labels regularly and 26% say they read every single time.

In all countries, expiry date is the most important information looked for on food labels, similar to India of 67%. But presence of GMO ingredients are not important information they looked for in food labeling.

Indian consumers pay attention to the food they consume. When asked about information normally looked for on food labels. 97% of the India respondents say expiry date, followed by total fat content 71%, calorie/energy 58% and vitamin contents as well as food additives at 55%.

When asking about missing information on food labels, as an average, about two thirds of the India consumers, 68% are satisfied with the existing information on the labels. None of those interviewed suggested presence of biotechnology-derived ingredients as an additional item to be included on labels.

Food Biotechnology in general

India consumers have an overall positive attitude towards food biotechnology and believe that GM food will help improve food quality and food sustainability in the next 5 years.

More than half of the consumers (53%) in the surveyed countries claim to have at least some knowledge on biotech food, while India (49%), knowledge levels are slightly lower compared to the average for the region. Half of the consumers in India have limited / no knowledge. 32% of consumers think biotech foods are available in grocery shops.

A better understanding of the consumer attitudes towards food biotechnology indicates the existence of two country clusters, the food production countries (China, India and the Philippines) and the food importing countries (South Korea and Japan), with distinct consumer perception patterns in each.

51% Consumers in India, the food producing countries, are more positive about the benefits plant biotechnology can bring. India (70%) are favorable towards the technology and a majority of the consumers believe that food biotechnology will bring benefits in the next few years such as improved food quality (39%), better for health (26%) and food sustainability(18%).

Consumer attitude towards ‘direct consumer benefits’ of food biotechnology

Majority of Indian consumers are ready to purchase biotechnology and almost all consumers support plant biotechnology if the technology is related to sustainable food production.

The study was divided into nutritious foods and food sustainability. Majority of Indian consumers are ready to purchase biotechnology food such as tastier tomato, 84%, cheaper food staples, 77%, and foods/cooking oil with healthier fat profile, 71%.

When asking about food sustainability 95% support plant biotechnology if the technology is related to sustainable food production. Consumer in India ranked 'reducing the amount of pesticides needed to produce food' as the most important factors in relation to 'sustainable food production' followed by 'increasing the production of food staples in the world', thereby 'reducing world hunger'.

CONCLUSIONS

The Asian Food Information Centre (www.afic.org) provided the result of the study on how consumers in INDIA perceive the use of biotechnology to produce foods and how likely it is consumers are accepting the various benefits biotechnology derived foods may bring.

India consumers seem to be the most confident with the food safety level in their countries. Their common and most important food safety concern are pesticide residues, food poisoning, and food from unknown source. Food biotechnology was not indicated as a safety concern in India.

Reading food labels is the norm in India and almost 70% of the consumers are satisfied with the provided information on food labels. Expiry date is by far the most important information looked for on food labels. Food biotechnology is not a spontaneous consumer labeling demand.

Half of consumers in India have at least some knowledge about biotechnology. They have an overall positive attitude towards food biotechnology. 70% of consumers have a neutral or favorable impression of using biotechnology to produce foods and 70% strongly believe that food biotechnology will bring benefits in the next few years.

Consumer in India, same as in China and the Philippines, are positive about the broad range of potential benefits biotech-derived foods can bring, expressed by a high likelihood of buying such foods. Indian consumers favor tastier food, cheaper food staples and foods/cooking oil with a healthier fat profile produced through biotechnology.

A majority of consumers in the surveyed countries believe sustainable food production is important. Indian consumers rated 'reducing the amount of pesticides needed to produce food' followed by 'increasing the production of food staples in the world, thereby reducing world hunger' as the most important crop growing factors related to sustainable food production.

About Asian Food Information Centre:

Our Mission:

To effectively communicate sound, science-based information on food safety, health and nutrition to media and other key audiences in the Asia region.

Our Organization:

Founded in 1998 and registered in Singapore, the AFIC team of scientific, health and communications professionals work in close collaboration with the academic and scientific communities in the region to close the gap between scientific understanding and popular consumer perception on a wide range of food and health topics.

Contact Us:

Mailing Address: P.O. Box 140 Phrakhanong Post Office, Bangkok Thailand 10110

Telephone: 662 6341285

Fax: 662 6341286

Email: info@afic.org

Website: www.afic.org

Registered Office: 3 Philip Street #18-00 Commerce Point, Singapore 048693