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MEMORANDUM

TO: The Pew Initiative On Food And Biotechnology

FROM: The Mellman Group, Inc.
Public Opinion Strategies, Inc.

DATE: September 15, 2003

SUBJECT: Recent Poll Findings

This analysis represents our initial analysis of a survey of 1000 American consumers who were interviewed by telephone August 5-10, 2003. Tracking data come from a survey of the same size, also conducted for the Pew Initiative, conducted January 22-28, 2001, <http://pewagbiotech.org/research/gmfood/survey3-01.pdf>. The margin of error for this survey is +/- 3.1% at the 95% level of confidence. The margin of error is higher for subgroups.

KEY FINDINGS

1. Americans' knowledge of genetically modified foods remains low.
2. Opposition to genetically modified foods has softened somewhat, and opinions about safety remain split.
3. Americans look to the FDA to provide a key stamp of approval on genetically modified foods.
4. Genetically modified plants meet with considerably more acceptance than genetically modified animals, and medical and personal safety issues are the most widely accepted uses of genetic modifications.

Awareness Of Genetically Modified Foods Remains Low

Knowledge about genetically modified (or biotechnology used in) foods remains low, and has not increased over the past two years. In 2001, 44% had heard a great deal or some about genetically modified (GM) foods; today, that number is 34%, a 10 point decline. Similarly, 45% had heard "a great deal" or "some" about biotechnology use in food production; today, that number is 36%, a nine point decline. There were similar increases in the numbers who have heard "not too much" or "nothing at all" (8 points for biotechnology, 11 points for GM foods).

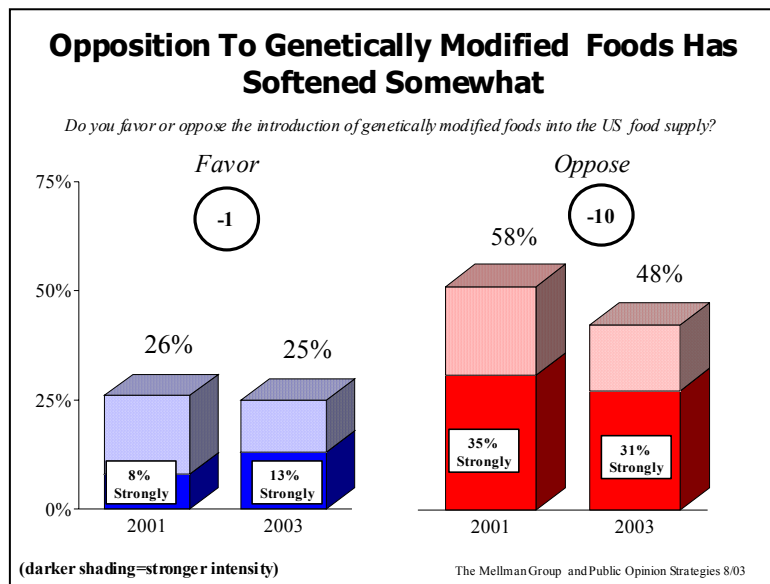
This change may be due in a small part to the timing of our 2001 survey, which came on the heels of the "StarLink" controversy regarding the unauthorized presence of genetically

modified corn in certain products. Nonetheless, it is interesting to note that not only has public awareness of the area not increased, it has declined – even as farmers are growing an increasing amount of GM crops.

Americans’ lack of knowledge about GM foods was clear when asked whether they have eaten them: just 24% say they have eaten GM foods, while 58% say they have not. While this represents a slight increase in the percentage who say they have eaten GM foods (from 19%) and a slight decline in the percentage saying they have not (from 62%), Americans continue to not recognize the extent to which GM foods are present in foods they eat every day.

While Support For Genetically Modified Foods Has Not Increased, Opposition Has Softened And Opinions on Safety Remain Split

Support for “introducing genetically modified foods into the US food supply” has remained essentially the same over the last two years: 25% today (13% strongly), down 1 point from 26% in 2001 (8% strongly). At the same time, opposition has declined, from 58% opposed in 2001 to 48% opposed today (31% strongly).



This lowered opposition is also borne out when asked whether they would eat genetically modified foods: 43% say they are likely to eat them (an increase from 38% in 2001), and 50% say they are not likely, down from 54% in 2001. And Americans have essentially the same opinion about the overall safety of GM foods as they did in 2001: 27% of consumers say that GM foods are “basically safe” (down from 29%), while 25% say that they are “basically unsafe” (the same as in 2001). And when informed that

more than half of products in grocery stores are produced using some form of biotechnology or genetic modification, belief that GM foods are safe increases to 44%, while belief that those foods are unsafe declines to 20%.

Taken together, these numbers indicate that while the American public has yet to roundly accept genetically modified food, intense opposition has not formed in the United States.

Americans Oppose A Ban On GM Foods, But Are Strongly Supportive Of A Regulatory Process Which Directly Involves The FDA

While Americans do not know much about how GM foods are regulated, two things are clear: they do not want to see GM foods banned, but at the same time also want to see FDA involvement before GM foods are put on the market.

Forty-five percent (45%) of Americans have heard something about government regulation of GM foods, with just 2% saying they have heard “a great deal” about it. Of those who have heard about these regulations, 10% say there is “too much” regulation of GM foods, 25% say there is the right amount of regulation, and a 35% plurality say there is “too little” regulation of GM foods.

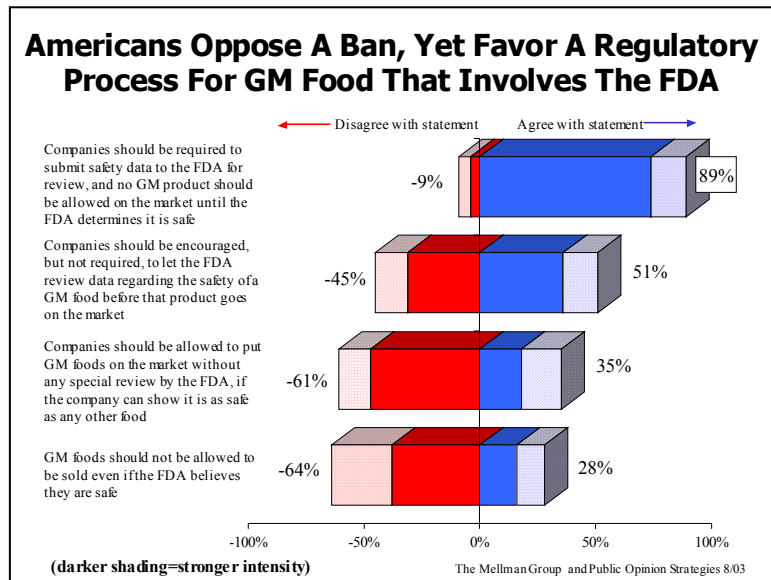
Consumers disagree with an outright ban on GM foods.

Sixty-four percent (64%) of Americans disagree with the statement, “genetically modified foods should not be allowed to be sold even if the Food and Drug Administration believes they are safe,” and just 28% of Americans feel that those foods should not be allowed, even if the FDA feels they are safe.

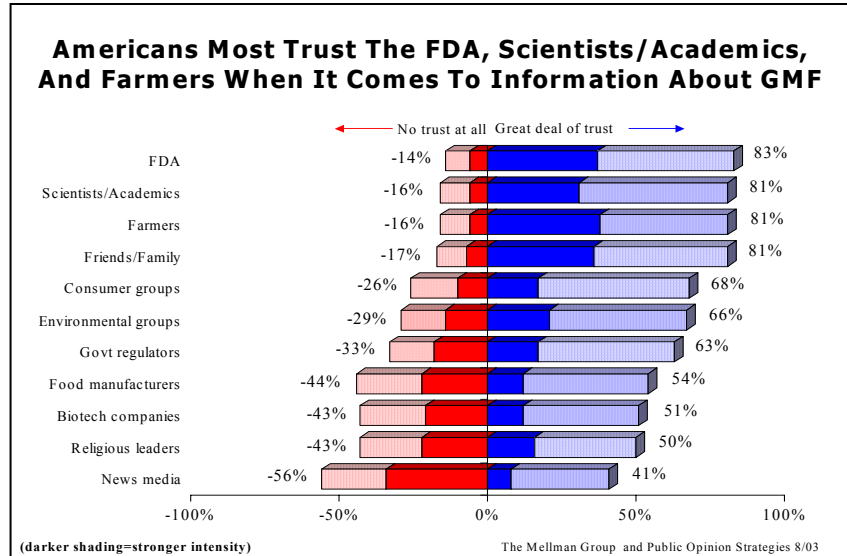
At the same time, there is overwhelming support for requiring companies to submit safety data to the FDA for review. Eighty-nine percent (89%) of Americans agree with the statement “Companies should be required to submit safety data to the Food and Drug Administration for review, and no genetically modified food product should be allowed on the market until the FDA determines it is safe.” Seventy-four percent (74%) of consumers say they agree strongly with that statement.

Support is more mixed for corporations to voluntarily disclose safety data. Fifty-one percent (51%), agree with encouraging [but not requiring] corporations to let the FDA review data regarding the safety of any new GM food, while 46% disagree.

And very few believe that GM foods should be allowed to go on the market without FDA review: just 35% agree with the statement “Companies should be allowed to put a genetically modified food on the market without any special review by the Food and Drug Administration, if the company can show it is as safe as any other food,” while 61% disagree with that statement (47% strongly).



It is clear that consumers want to see the FDA’s imprimatur on genetically modified foods before they are put on the market. The importance of the FDA for consumer’s opinions about GM foods is underscored by the fact that 83% of consumers say they trust what the FDA has to say about these foods “some” or “a great deal” (37% “a great deal”). Given the mixed feelings about the safety of GM foods, the FDA has an important role to play in reassuring consumers about their safety.

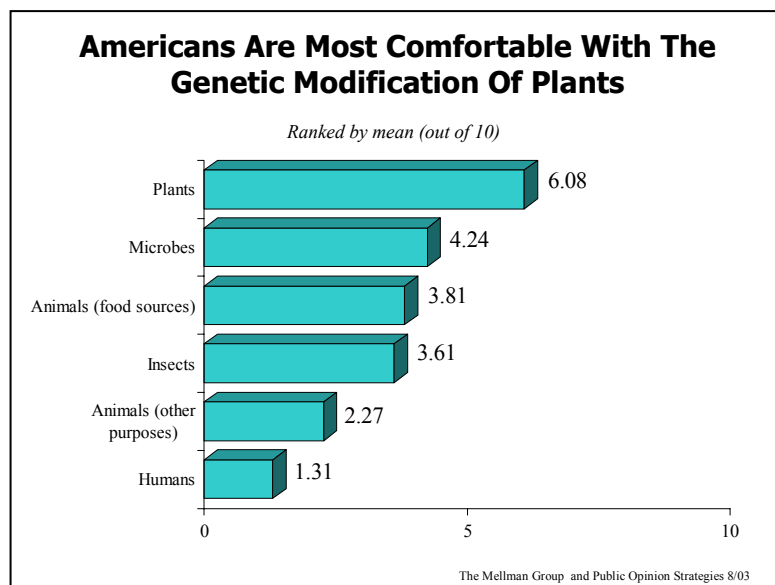


Americans Are Far More Comfortable With Genetic Modifications Of Plants Than Animals

Americans are far more comfortable with genetic modifications to plants than animals, and are particularly supportive of genetic modifications that improve health.

Overall, consumers oppose scientific research into genetic modifications of animals: 58% oppose this research (46% strongly) and 32% favor this type of research.

Asked to rate how “comfortable” they are with genetic modifications of different types of life forms (on a 0 to 10 scale), consumers say they are most comfortable with modifications of plants (6.1). Their comfort level appears to be inversely related with how close they are personally to the different life forms: after plants, consumers are most comfortable with genetic modifications of microbes (4.2), animals used for food (3.8), insects (3.6), followed by animals used for other purposes, including horses, cats and dogs (2.3). Consumers are least comfortable with genetic modifications of humans (1.3).

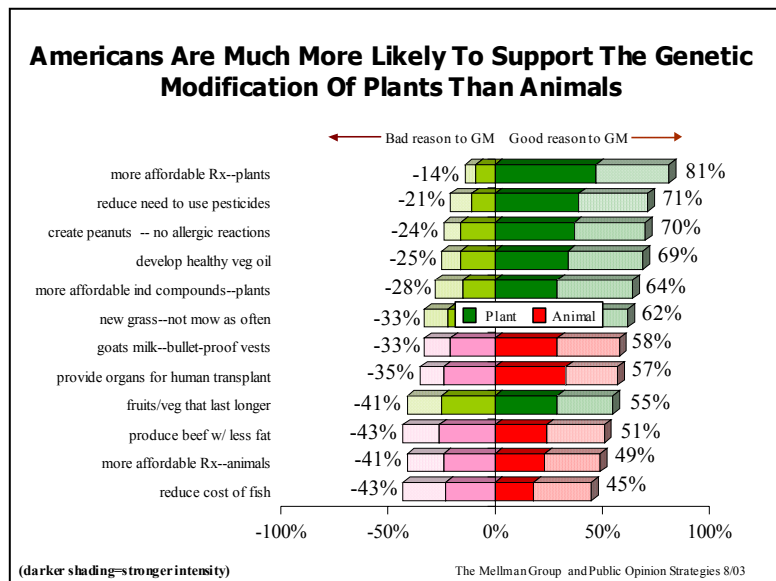


It is important to note that despite deviations in comfort levels across groups (for example, those with college educations are somewhat more comfortable with every type of genetic modifications), the *order* of comfort levels is basically consistent across subgroups. Regardless of age, gender, and education, consumers are most comfortable with genetic modifications of plants, and are substantially less comfortable with modifications of certain types of animals, and are particularly uncomfortable with genetic modifications of humans.

The “plants over animals” dynamic is also clear when asked about specific purposes for pursuing genetic modifications. Indeed, *nearly every* purpose that involved plants was considered a better reason to pursue genetic modifications than those which involved animals.

The starkest example of this difference comes from a split sample simulation we conducted involving genetic modifications to produce more affordable pharmaceuticals. Half the sample was asked about those modifications involving plants, the other half involving animals. Eighty-one percent (81%) said that producing more affordable pharmaceuticals was a good reason to genetically modify plants (47% very good), with 14% saying it was a bad reason. On the other hand, just 49% said that it was a good reason to genetically modify *animals*, (23% very good), while 41% say it is a bad reason to modify animals. The transition from plants to animals to achieve this goal reduced support by 32 points, and caused a net change of 59 points.

Looking exclusively at those purposes that involved plants, consumers favored those that enhanced the health and safety of their daily lives. The most popular was producing less expensive pharmaceuticals (81% “good reason”), followed by “reduc[ing] the need to use pesticides in crops” (71% good reason), to creating peanuts that won’t cause allergic reactions (70% good reason), and developing vegetable oil with heart healthy fats (69% good reason). Other purposes we tested included creating grass that needed to be mowed less often (62% good reason), and to create more shelf-stable fruits and vegetables (55%).



The only animal-related modification that received more positive response than the lowest-rated plant-related modifications were creating goats which produce milk that can be used for bullet-proof vests (58% “good reason”) and providing organs for transplant to humans (57% “good reason”). And for these two, opposition was stronger than it was among any of the plant-related modifications.