

International Food Information Council 2010 “Consumer Perceptions of Food Technology” Survey





International Food Information Council
2010 “Consumer Perceptions of
Food Technology” Survey

Executive Summary

The 2010 “Consumer Perceptions of Food Technology” Survey, commissioned by the International Food Information Council, is the 14th nationally representative survey designed to gain insights into consumer perspectives on food technology. This year’s research tracks trends on public awareness and perceptions of various aspects of plant and animal biotechnology, confidence in the safety of the U.S. food supply, and attitudes toward food labeling. In addition, we reveal perceptions and potential education opportunities related to new and emerging technologies, such as nanotechnology; identify benefits of food biotechnology that resonate with consumers; and explore opinions on sustainable food production in greater depth.

Key Findings

This year’s survey found many consumers are favorable toward benefits of plant and animal biotechnology, as well as emerging technologies such as nanotechnology, especially those that have a positive impact on both their health and the health of the planet. In addition, awareness of sustainable food production is at a new high this year, and is a common benefit influencing consumers’ likelihood to purchase foods produced through biotechnology.

Methodology

The 14th “Consumer Perceptions of Food Technology” Survey was fielded by Cogent Research of Cambridge, Massachusetts between April 5 and 26, 2010. Seven hundred fifty U.S. adults were polled using an online survey tool. Results were weighted on marital status and education to be nationally representative. The survey, formerly the “IFIC Survey of Consumer Attitudinal Trends toward Food Biotechnology”, is part of a series that has been conducted since 1997.

Confidence in the Food Supply →

Despite continuing attention on food safety concerns, the majority of consumers are somewhat or very confident in the safety of the U.S. food supply.

Since 2007, Americans’ confidence in the safety of the U.S. food supply has remained high, with more than two-thirds of consumers indicating they are “somewhat or very confident” in the safety of the food supply, with 69% in 2007, 68% in 2008, and 69% in 2010. When asked about specific food safety concerns, only 2 percent of respondents list biotechnology as a top-of-mind concern (See Table 1 to the right).

Table 2. Awareness of Sustainable Food Production

How much have you read or heard about the concept of sustainability in food production?

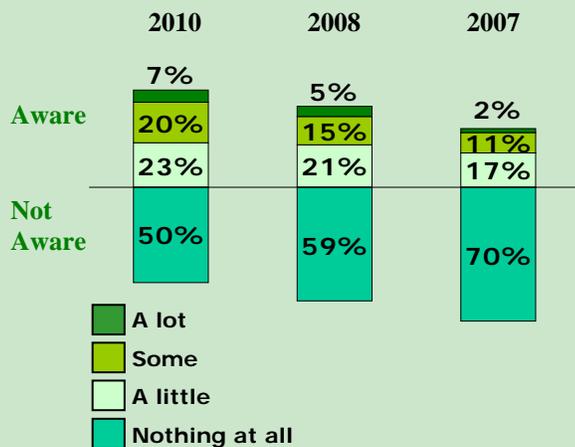
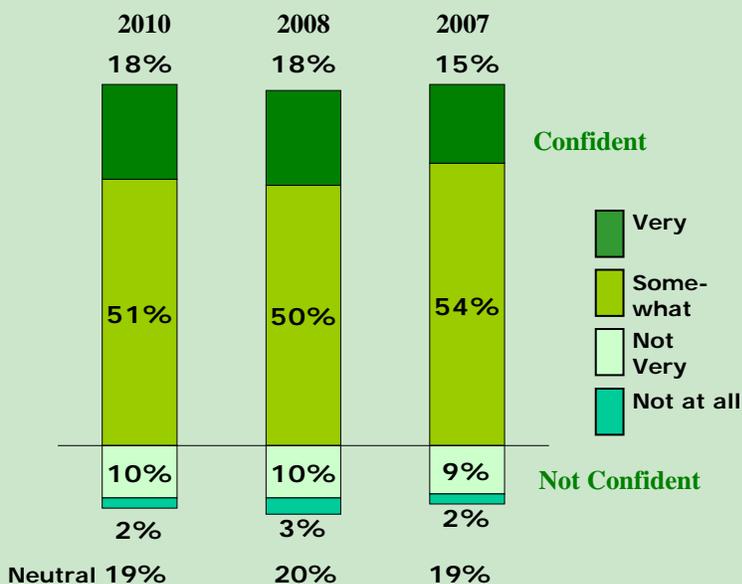


Table 1. Confidence in the Food Supply

How confident are you in the safety of the US Food supply?



← **Sustainability** *Significantly more consumers have heard or read at least “a little” about the concept of sustainability in food production.*

This year, we found that half of consumers (50 percent) have heard or read at least “a little” about the concept of sustainability in food production. This is a significant increase from 2008, when only 41 percent had read or heard anything about sustainability in food production, and 2007, when only 30 percent had heard or read anything about sustainability in food production (See Table 2 to the left).

(Sustainability continued)

Consumers were asked to rank factors related to growing crops in a sustainable manner in order of importance to them. “Growing more food on less land so valuable land like rain forests is not needed as growing space” and “Reducing the amount of pesticides needed to produce food” were ranked first by 27 percent of consumers each. “Growing more food to help feed the growing global population” followed, with 23 percent ranking it as most important. “Plants that use water more efficiently, thereby conserving fresh water” (13 percent) and “Using conservation tillage farming methods, which reduce soil loss and greenhouse gas emissions” (10 percent) came in third and fourth, respectively (See Table 3 below).

New this year, we also asked consumers to rank general aspects of sustainability in order of importance. Two-thirds (66 percent) ranked “Land and water use and efficiency” in their top three, followed by “Ensuring a sufficient food supply for the growing global population” (63 percent) and “Maximum output with minimal use of natural resources” (59 percent). Other aspects of sustainability, such as “lower carbon footprint” and “fewer food miles” were ranked lower by consumers, at 24 percent and 14 percent, respectively.

This is also the first year we explored consumers’ → likelihood to purchase food products such as bread, crackers, cookies, cereal or pasta containing wheat that was grown using plant biotechnology and produced using sustainable practices. The majority of Americans — 80 percent — said they would be

somewhat or very likely to purchase these types of products. While products containing wheat grown using biotechnology are still up to a decade away from commercial availability, these data indicate a potentially receptive audience (See Table 4 below).

Table 4. Likelihood to Purchase Biotech Wheat Products

How likely would you be to purchase bread, crackers, cookies, cereal, or pasta products containing wheat that was grown using plant biotechnology, if they were produced using sustainable practices to feed more people using less resources (such as land and pesticides)?

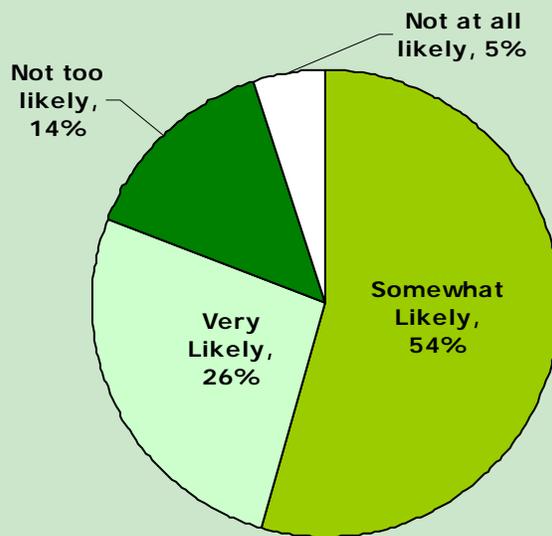
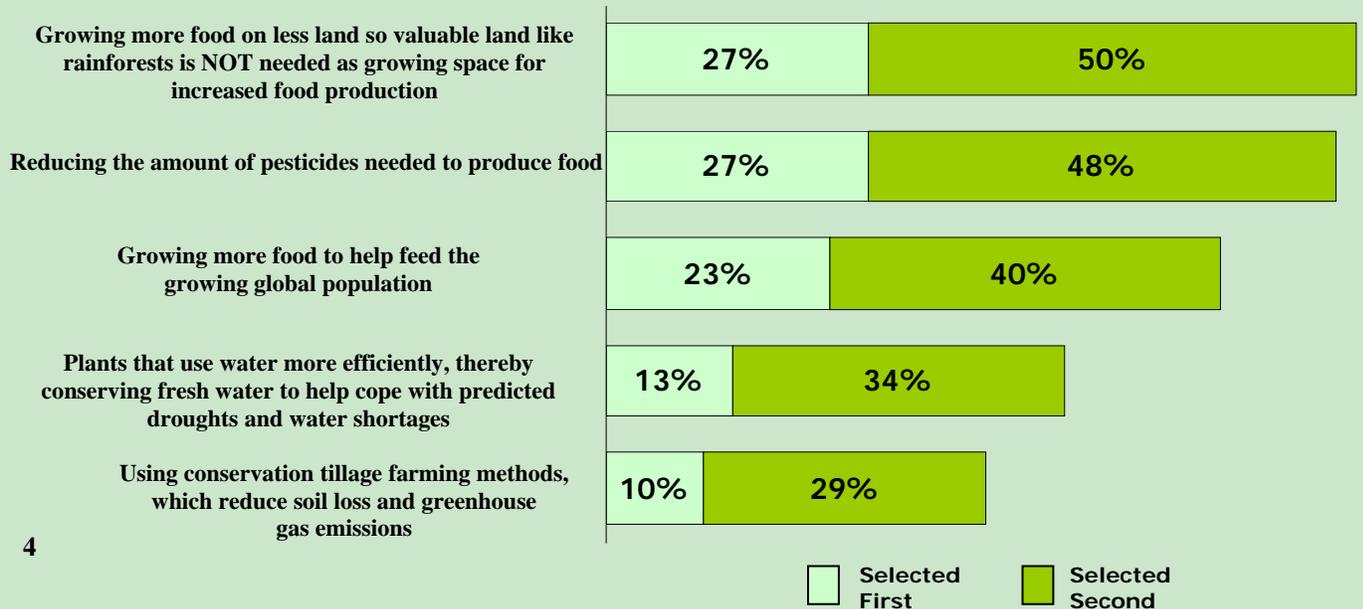


Table 3. Importance of Crop Growing Factors in 2010

Please rank the following five factors related to growing sustainable crops in order of importance to you.



Plant Biotechnology

Americans' support of the use of food biotechnology is strongest when they consider its potential benefits for reducing the impact of food production on the environment and for improving sustainability.

Consumers are largely familiar with the term “biotechnology”: More than two-thirds of consumers (69%) have read or heard at least “a little” about the concept. However, only about one-third (32%) are somewhat or very favorable toward plant biotechnology, with about three in ten (29%) who are neither favorable nor unfavorable, and about two in ten (19%) who are somewhat or very unfavorable. Interestingly, however, half (51%) of consumers say they are favorable toward farmers using biotechnology to grow more crops that would help meet food demand.

In addition, significantly more consumers this year (28%, vs. 23% in 2008) believe foods produced through

biotechnology are available in the supermarket today, although this figure is still relatively low.

Certain benefits of biotechnology are found to resonate better with consumers than others. These tend to be consumer-facing qualities such as improved health or better taste. (See Table 5 below). For example, the majority of consumers say they are somewhat or very likely to purchase foods produced through biotechnology to provide more healthful fats like Omega-3s (76%), to avoid trans fat (74%), and to make foods taste better/fresher (67%). This is consistent from 2008.

Additionally, more than three-quarters (77%) of consumers say they would be likely to purchase foods produced through biotechnology for their ability to reduce pesticide use, and 73% of consumers said they would be likely to purchase bread, crackers, cookies, cereal, or pasta made with flour from wheat that had been modified by biotechnology to use less land, water, and/or pesticides.

Table 5. Likelihood to Purchase Biotech Foods For Specific Benefits

All other things being equal, how likely would you be to buy:

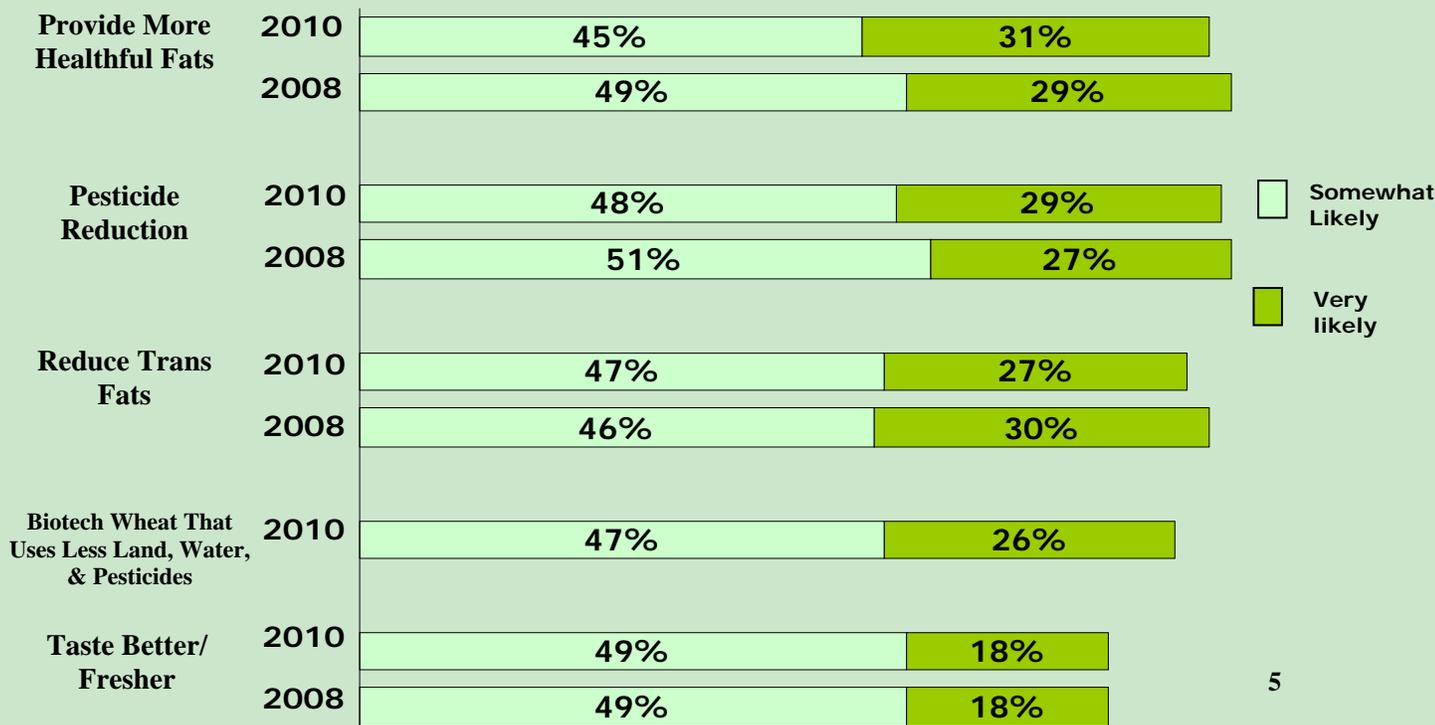
A food product, made with oils that had been modified by biotechnology to provide more healthful fats, like Omega-3, in the food?

A variety of produce, like tomatoes or potatoes, if it had been modified by biotechnology to be protected from insect damage and require fewer pesticide applications?

A food product made with oils that had been modified by biotechnology to avoid trans fats?

Bread, crackers, cookies, cereals or pasta made with flour from wheat that had been modified by biotechnology to use less land, water, and/or pesticides?

A variety of produce, like tomatoes or potatoes, if it had been modified by biotechnology to taste better or fresher?



Animal Biotechnology

Lack of information about animal biotechnology is the primary reason "not favorable" consumers hold this opinion.

About three in ten (29%) Americans are somewhat or very favorable toward animal biotechnology, while one-quarter (24%) are neither favorable nor unfavorable, and slightly more than one-quarter (27%) are somewhat or very unfavorable. However, the primary reasons consumers give for being not favorable (i.e. somewhat or very unfavorable or neutral) toward animal biotechnology relate to lack of information and not understanding the benefits of animal biotechnology: More than half (55%) of "not favorable" consumers (n=382) chose "I don't have enough information" about animal biotechnology as their primary reason, while 39 percent cited "I don't understand the benefits of using biotechnology with animals." This indicates that additional education/information could potentially help to improve consumer understanding, enabling them to make more informed decisions regarding animal biotechnology.

In addition, consumers reported a generally positive impact on their impressions of several statements about benefits of animal biotechnology. For example, when consumers were provided with the statement "Animal biotechnology can increase farm efficiency; that is, increase the amount of food produced while decreasing the amount of resources needed, such as animal feed (i.e., corn, water, etc.)," more than half of consumers (53%) reported a positive impact on their impression. Moreover, nearly two-thirds (65%) of consumers reported a positive impact of the statement "Animal biotechnology can improve the quality and safety of our food (for example, through improved animal health or improved nutritional quality of the food produced)" on their impressions. And, when provided with the statement "Animal biotechnology can reduce the impact of livestock, such as animal waste, on the environment," again, more than half (53%) of consumers said the statement had a positive impact on their impression of animal biotechnology (See Table 6 to the right).

Genomics & Genetic Engineering

When provided with a brief definition of genomics (a form of animal biotechnology that uses knowledge about the genetic makeup of farm animals to aid in producing better offspring for improved meat, milk, and egg quality), about four in ten (44%) of consumers have a "very favorable" or "somewhat favorable" impression, while 41 percent have a "very favorable" or "somewhat favorable" impression of genetic engineering (a form of animal biotechnology that allows for the transfer of beneficial traits from one animal to another in a precise way that allows for improved nutritional content or less environmental impact).

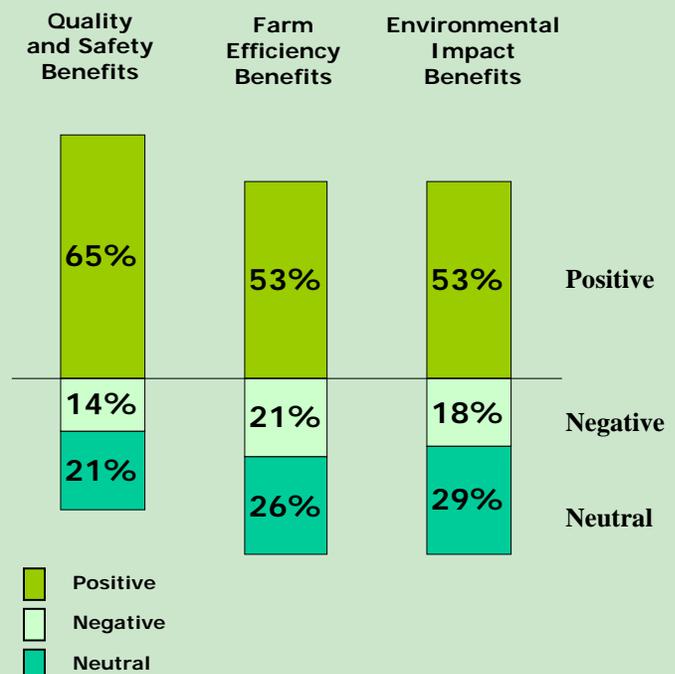
Table 6. Impact of Animal Biotechnology Benefits on Impressions

Please read the following statements regarding the potential benefits of animal biotechnology and indicate whether the information has a positive effect on your impression, a negative effect, or no effect at all.

Animal biotechnology can increase farm efficiency; that is, it can increase the amount of food produced while decreasing the amount of resources need, such as animal feed.

Animal biotechnology can improve the quality and safety of our food (for example, through improved animal health or improved nutritional quality of the food produced).

Animal biotechnology can reduce the impact of livestock, such as animal waste, on the environment.



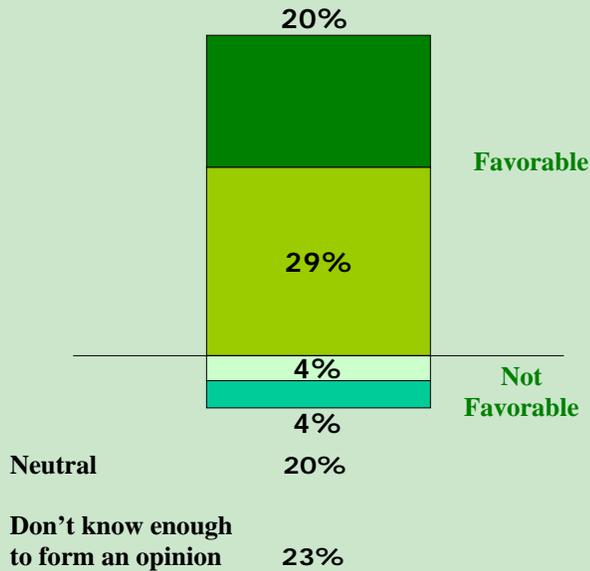
Perceptions of Nanotechnology

Awareness of nanotechnology is low; however, half of consumers are favorable toward the use of nanotechnology in applications that would improve the safety and quality of food.

This year we asked some new questions around awareness and perceptions of nanotechnology (that is, a science that involves the design and application of structures, devices and systems on an extremely small scale, called the nanoscale (i.e. billionths of a meter, or about 1-millionth the size of a pinhead)). When consumers were asked about their knowledge of nanotechnology for food applications, without being given any other information, about two-thirds (66%) said they had heard or read "Nothing at all".

Table 7. Perceptions of Nanotechnology

What is your overall impression of using nanotechnology in food production or packaging for such purposes as extending freshness, decreasing the risk of foodborne illness, and improving nutrition? Would you say you are...?



However, when provided with the previous definition of nanotechnology and information about potential benefits in food applications (such as in food packaging and processing to improve food safety and quality; and better nutrient and ingredient profiles to improve health), half of consumers (49%) indicated they were in favor of the technology (See Table 7 above). This indicates that education regarding new and emerging food technologies will continue to be needed to raise consumer awareness and comprehension.

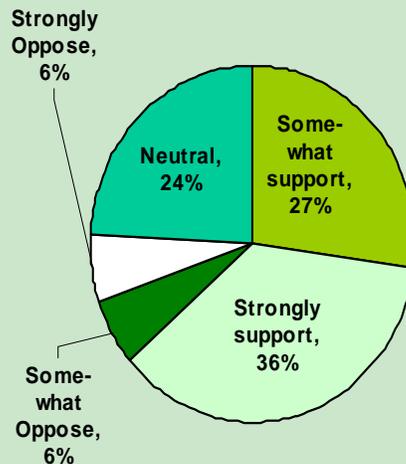
Food Labeling

Satisfaction with current food labels remains high, with only 18 percent of Americans who could think of information they would like to see added to food labels.

Consumers are generally satisfied with information currently provided on food labels. Eighty-two percent say they cannot think of anything additional they would like to see on the label.

Of the 18% who *would* like to see additional information on the label, only 3% mentioned anything about biotechnology. In addition, more than six in ten (63%) consumers are satisfied with the Food and Drug Administration's (FDA's) labeling policy for biotech foods, which includes labeling changes to the nutritional content or composition of a food, or identifying a food safety issue, should biotechnology's use introduce such changes (See Table 8 below). Furthermore, more than two-thirds (68%) of consumers say they would be somewhat or very likely to purchase meat, milk, and eggs from animals enhanced through genetic engineering, since FDA has determined that they are safe.

Table 8. Position on FDA's Biotech Labeling Policy



For More Information:

For an electronic copy of this report and the full data tables, please visit the International Food Information Council Foundation Web site at: www.foodinsight.org



International Food Information Council

1100 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Suite 430
Washington, DC 20036
(202) 296-6540



International Food Information Council and Foundation

1100 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Suite 430
Washington, DC 20036
(202) 296-6540
www.foodinsight.org

