

## Summary Of Findings

### “Public Sentiment About Genetically Modified Food”

Prepared by The Mellman Group and Public Opinion Strategies,  
For the Pew Initiative on Food and Biotechnology

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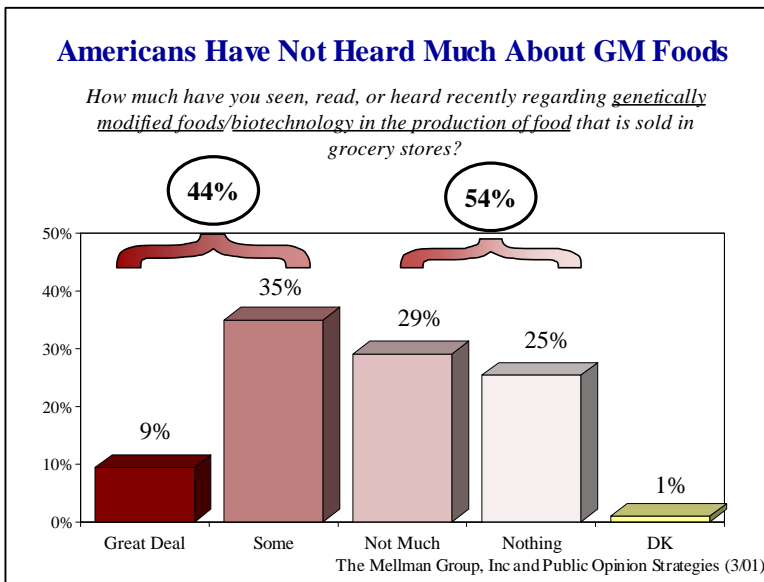
A recent survey on biotechnology and genetically modified (GM) foods revealed that consumers know relatively little about GM foods, are uncertain about their safety and change their views about safety when more information about widespread use of GM foods is revealed. Opposition to the introduction of GM foods to the U.S. food supply also exists.

The survey, conducted by telephone January 22-28, 2001, included 1001 American consumers. The margin of error for this survey is +/- 3.1% at the 95% level of confidence. The margin of error is higher for subgroups.

### Americans Know Relatively Little About Genetically Modified Foods And Biotechnology

The survey reveals that American consumers have heard relatively little about genetically modified foods. Only 44% of consumers have heard either a “great deal” or “some” about either genetically modified foods or biotechnology in the production of foods.

Only 9% have heard a great deal. Over half (54%) have heard “not much” or “nothing.”



Consumers of higher socioeconomic status tend to have heard substantially more about genetically modified foods than others. Of those consumers with a college degree or more, 59% have heard about genetically modified foods, while 40% have not. Of those with a high school diploma or less, only 36% have heard about genetically modified foods,

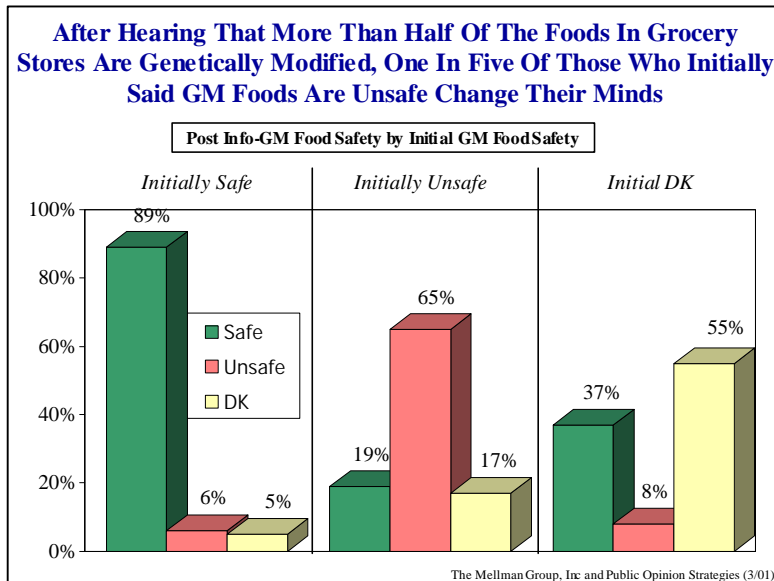
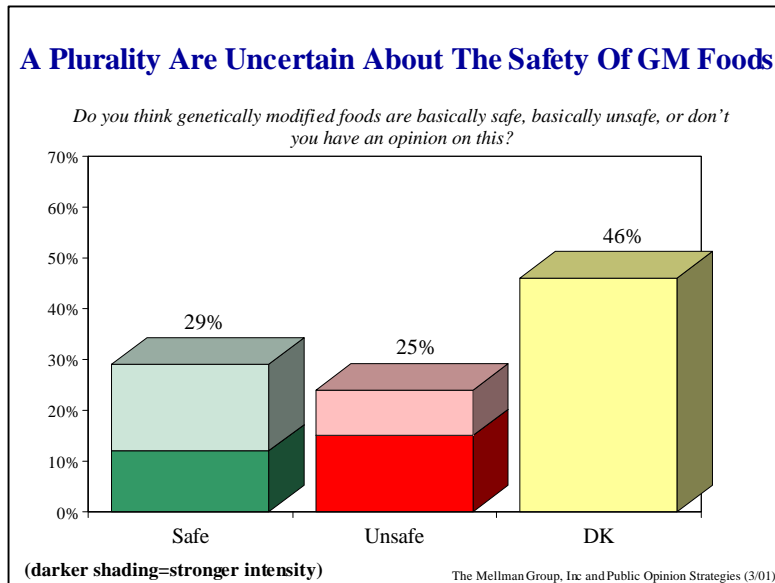
while 62% of those consumers have not heard much about those foods.

Few consumers believe that genetically modified foods are in wide use in the foods supply, and even fewer believe that they have eaten them. Most consumers – 60% – believe that less than half of the food in grocery stores contains genetically modified ingredients, with 38% believing that less than a quarter of food contains genetically modified ingredients. Only 14% of consumers believe that more than half of food contains those sorts of ingredients.

Additionally, few Americans believe they have eaten genetically modified foods. Only 19% say they have eaten GM foods, 62% say they have not, and 19% say they don't know. Those with higher education are more likely to believe they have eaten genetically modified foods: 26% of those with a college degree or greater believe they have eaten GM foods, while only 15% of those with a high school degree or less believe they have.

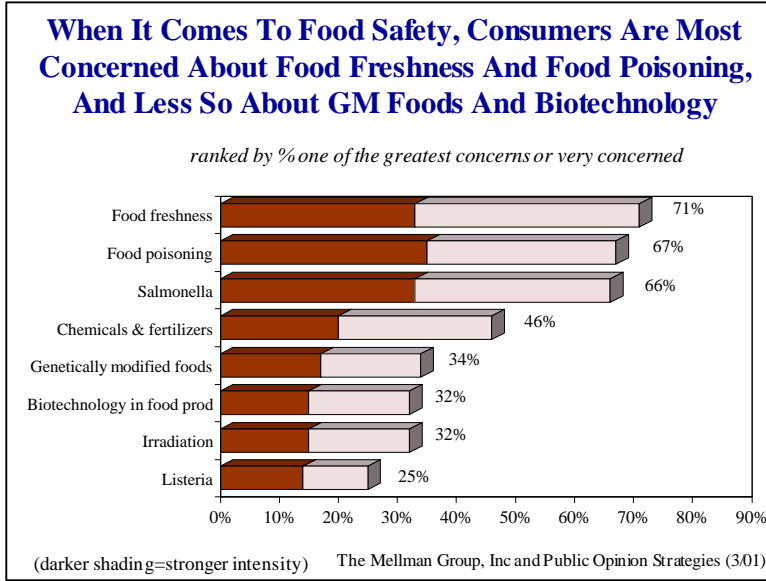
**Despite Initial Opposition to Genetically Modified Foods And Uncertainty About Their Safety, Some Consumers' Opinions Appear To Be Malleable**

Most Americans oppose the introduction of genetically modified foods into the food supply, although they are largely uncertain about the safety of these foods. Fifty-eight percent (58%) of consumers oppose the introduction of genetically modified foods into the US food supply, while 26% favor their introduction and 16% are undecided. There is a substantial difference across gender, with 35% of men supporting introducing GM foods (50% opposed), and 18% of women in favor (66% opposed).



Yet consumers are uncertain about how safe genetically modified foods are, and those opinions are not firmly set. When asked whether GM foods are basically safe, a plurality (46%) say that they don't know, 29% say they are basically safe, and 25% say they are basically unsafe. When informed that more than half of the products at the grocery store include GM foods, a plurality of 48% then say that genetically modified foods are safe, only 21% say that they are unsafe,

and 31% are unsure. In fact, one in five of those who initially said GM foods were unsafe, changed their minds. Thus, when some consumers learn more about the widespread use of GM foods, they are more likely to believe that they are basically safe.

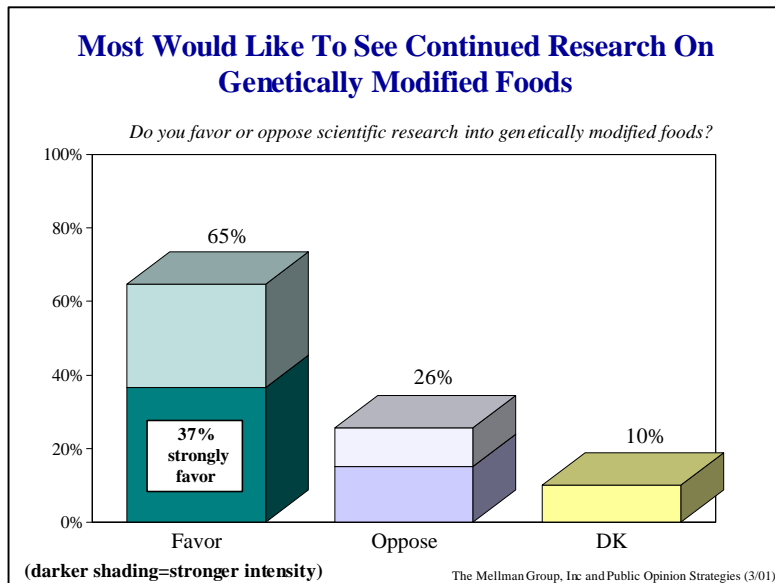


Additionally, when it comes to food safety in general, GM foods are not consumers' prime concern. Only 34% said that GM foods is one of the things about which they are most concerned or very concerned when it comes to food safety, and fewer (32%) said the same about biotechnology in food production. This ranks well below food freshness (71% concerned) food poisoning (67% concerned), and salmonella (66% concerned). GM foods also rank behind chemicals and

fertilizer with respect to food safety, about which 46% of Americans said that they are most concerned or very concerned.

**Americans Want Research On Genetically Modified Foods To Continue, And Want To Know Whether The Foods They Eat Are Genetically Modified**

Americans are strongly supportive of additional research into genetically modified foods. Sixty-five percent (65%) of Americans favor research into genetically modified foods, with 37% strongly favoring this research, while 26% oppose additional research. Support for further research is greatest among those with college degrees or more (75% favoring further research), but majorities across all education levels support more research.



Lastly, Americans want to know whether their foods have been genetically altered. Seventy-five percent (75%) of Americans say it is important to them to know whether a product contains genetically modified ingredients, with 46% saying it is very important. Only 21% of consumers say that it is not important for them to know whether a product has been genetically modified.

## **Summary**

In summary, consumers are concerned about the products produced by agricultural biotechnology, but limited knowledge about GM foods makes their views uncertain and malleable. The majority of Americans have heard very little about GM foods and don't know what to think about its safety, despite (or perhaps due to) having received little information about genetic modification.

The public's uncertainty is coupled by a desire to have more information available to them about GM foods and opposition to the introduction of GM foods to the U.S. food supply. However, they remain extremely supportive of continued research into GM foods and look toward the regulatory agencies (primarily FDA and EPA) to provide them with accurate and trustworthy information.