

## What people know about genetically modified foods

Did you know that there are 23 genetically modified commodities (types of food) available in Australia that come from six types of plants?

The only GM crops grown commercially in Australia are cotton and carnations. Only cottonseed oil is used in our food supply.

Countries such as the United States, Canada and Argentina are growing, eating and exporting many other GM crops including corn, soybeans and canola. Some other countries are not so comfortable with the technology and do not allow growing or importation of GM foods.

What do average people here in Australia think about GM foods and crops?

At the end of this worksheet you will have:

- surveyed a sample of people to find out what they think about GM crops and about eating food derived from these plants
- compared your data with large-scale data from across Australia over several years.

### What you will need:

- access to the internet

## PART A

### What to do:

1. Work individually or in pairs to work out a set of survey questions. To do this you will need to decide:
  - a) What do you want to know about people's knowledge about GM food and their attitudes to GM food? You might want to find out:
    - i. if people know what a GM crop is
    - ii. whether or not they are concerned about GM crops
    - iii. what it is they are concerned about
    - iv. whether or not they would eat foods derived from GM plants.
  - b) Think of one question for each piece of information you want to find out. For example, 'Are you concerned about genetically modified crops?'

- c) Make sure that your questions are fairly short so that people will be able to understand them easily.
  - d) Make sure that your questionnaire will not take up too much of a person's time to answer.
2. Print your questionnaire and survey between 10 and 20 people.
  3. Collate (put together) the group or class results.  
Discuss the results and decide what it is that most people are concerned about in relation to GM crops and what the most common issues are. A summary of this will become a major part of your report.
  4. Go to Biotechnology Australia to compare your data with the large-scale surveys that have been conducted every two years since 1999.

2007:

<http://www.biotechnology.gov.au/index.cfm?event=object.showContent&objectID=DCE82A65-EBEE-A004-F1F274EB7E4B2577>

2005:

<http://www.biotechnology.gov.au/index.cfm?event=object.showContent&objectID=BAADA361-F11B-165A-5FA7EE664A2BB359>

2003:

<http://www.biotechnology.gov.au/index.cfm?event=object.showContent&objectID=F771AD9E-BCD6-81AC-15E8E2C315F1B4DA>

2001:

<http://www.biotechnology.gov.au/index.cfm?event=object.showContent&objectID=FC7E82A5-BCD6-81AC-131E0FB742A5806E>

1999:

<http://www.biotechnology.gov.au/index.cfm?event=object.showContent&objectID=FC7F7DBE-BCD6-81AC-135CD90389558AFC>

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#### Biotechnology Online School Resource

For further information contact the Gene Technology Information Service on freecall Australia-wide **1800 631 276**.  
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**What to do with your information:**

1. Prepare a group report to present to the class. The report should include:
  - a summary of the ideas that you wanted to find out about in your survey
  - a list of the questions that you asked
  - a summary of the results
  - a concluding statement that sums up what you think the results mean
  - how your data compared with Biotechnology Australia's national data.
2. Show all the sources that you referred to.

**Useful resources**

CSIRO - Genetically modified foods and community opinion  
<http://www.csiro.au/multimedia/GMvideo.html>

CSIRO – GM research  
<http://www.csiro.au/org/BiotechAtCSIRO.html>

**PART B****What to do:**

In groups of two or three, read the following examples of survey questions. Think about the answers you might hear for each question and answer the questions below.

Using genetic modification to develop crops with traits such as higher yield, built-in pest resistance, increased nutritional value and an ability to grow in poor soils will help beat many of the environmental issues associated with modern agriculture. By improving yields and being able to farm on poor soils, genetic modification will also help to provide more food as the world's population grows without the need to clear more land. This will help to conserve our biodiversity. Do you favour the funding of genetic modification research?

Modern agriculture has led to environmental degradation and the use of chemicals that enter our food supply. Genetic modification is a modern technique that can make crops plants containing chemicals to kill pests. The pollen from these plants could spread to organic and conventional crops reducing the food choices consumers now enjoy. Do you support funding of genetic modification research?

- Can the way you ask a question change the answer you receive?
- How could results from each of the survey questions above be used?
- Are the people asking the questions above trying to get others to agree or disagree with a particular point of view? Why might they do this?

Think about how you wrote your survey questions.

- Did you have to make any assumptions when you wrote the question?
- Did you give any background information before you asked each question? Should you have done?
- Who did you survey? Was it your friends, parents or teachers?
- How important is the sample group? What happens to your results if you only ask lots of the same kind of people?