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Greenpeace funded GM survey backfires

A Newspoll funded by professional GM opponents, Greenpeace, has backfired despite their attempts to “spin” the results.

While the survey was purported to show that 9 out of 10 Australians wanted “better” labelling of GM foods, that proportion actually said that they wanted the foods to be labelled. Australia already has some of the strongest GM food labelling laws in the world, requiring GM foods to be labelled if there is altered DNA or protein in the final product or it has a different characteristic to the conventional food. Survey respondents DID NOT say they were dissatisfied with these labelling arrangements.

Another clumsy sleight of hand was attempted when the green activists pointed to the 2% of respondents who said they were more likely to buy a product if they knew it contained GM ingredients, as opposed to a majority of 54% who said they were less likely to buy it. In doing so, our attention was meant to be diverted from the 44% of Australians who, even when prompted, do not care whether food contains GM ingredients or not. These Australians are not concerned about GM food because GM ingredients approved by Australian regulators are safe to eat.

These findings align with a survey taken earlier this year of 1200 Australian consumers by the independent food regulator, Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ).

Asked to choose from a list of “what information do you usually look for” on a label, people nominated the “use by” date (73.1%), country of origin (59.1%) and calories (38.0%), fats, sugars and additives. People said they looked for 16 other things on the label before they looked for GM content.

The FSANZ survey also found that people are much more interested in the fat, sugar and salt content of their food than whether it is GM. When asked “which types of foods do you have concerns about?”, only 2.9 percent nominated GM food whereas 24.7% mentioned the safety of fresh fruit or vegetables. Other food concerns were meat (18.8%), raw chicken (17.9%), fish (12%) and imported foods (11.9%).

Until recently, professional opponents to GM crops were claiming that Australia should not grow GM crops because there were no export markets for them. Having been proven wrong, they have changed tack and are now trying to whip up a scare campaign about GM food.

GM crops have been more extensively studied and assessed for safety than any other food. A report commissioned by the European Union (who have long been sceptical about GM crops) that was released earlier this month looked at all available toxicity studies, multi-generation animal feeding studies and health assessments of people who have consumed GM food.

The EU experts concluded in their report that there has been no demonstration of any negative health effects from GM food and the evidence is comprehensive that existing GM foods are as safe as conventionally produced food. This same conclusion has been reached by the World Health Organization, the United Nations, the Australian Academy of Sciences and at least 7 other national science bodies.

It is precisely because of the well established safety of GM foods, and Australia’s strong and credible regulatory system, that a growing number of Australians are unconcerned about GM foods.

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