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## Consumers shun GM food superstition

Over the past months a series of studies have revealed that across the globe consumers continue to move beyond activist claims against GM food and freely purchase labelled GM food. GM foods have been approved for sale and eaten safely in Australia and around the world for over ten years – equivalent to more than 1 trillion meals.

Consumers are not concerned about GM food because it is safe to eat. In September 2008, the European Commission's scientific agency conducted a review of all the information that is available on GM foods. The review concluded that there is comprehensive evidence that existing GM foods are safe.

Australian farmers are harvesting their first GM canola crops in NSW and Victoria because they are confident that consumers around the world are happy to eat GM food – even the apparently conservative eaters influencing the Europeans markets.

A European Commission funded study (released in October) [Do consumers buy GM foods?](#) concluded that Europeans do in fact buy GM foods and consume them where they are offered. In a lengthy tracking survey of consumer purchasing behaviour it was found that most consumers, even those who stated in focus groups that they would not buy GM food, did not actively avoid it. It was revealed that GM ingredients are not a major consideration when shopping – instead quality and freshness, value for money and familiarity with the product were much more important.

In Canada, the world's largest producer of GM canola, the message is the same with a survey of 1000 Canadians commissioned by [BIOTECanada](#) (released in August) demonstrating that consumer food interests have shifted radically and they are mostly unconcerned whether or not food is genetically modified.

In fact Canadians go so far as to say that they want to see their government invest in biotechnology because they view it as vital to Canada's economic prosperity. What's more, 80% of the consumers surveyed thought biotechnology would bring modest to major benefits to agriculture and improve the nutritional value of food crops. On top of this most respondents expected to personally benefit from biotechnology.

While we are yet to see such positive support for agricultural biotechnology in Australia we do know it is not a major concern for our consumers. The Australian food regulator, FSANZ, conducted a [consumer attitudes survey](#) last year which found that only very few people (2%) are concerned about the safety of GM foods and they are instead much more interested in fat, sugar and salt content. When asked what information they normally look for on a label they listed 16 other things before GM ingredients.

The ongoing anti-GM campaign continues to attempt to convince food producers and government decision makers that consumers are opposed to GM food. This is in the face of known import volumes of GM products by so called sensitive markets such as Japan, the biggest importer of canola worldwide, which bought 42% of the world supply in 2006 including 1982Kt of GM canola from Canada which they mixed with just 312Kt of conventional Australian canola before processing into oil.

These studies, and many more like them, continue to show consumers are actually unconcerned by GM foods and are beginning to understand the exceptional potential of agricultural biotechnology to support a safe, affordable and plentiful food supply.

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*CropLife Australia is the peak body representing the producers of crop protection and crop biotechnology products in Australia and is a member of CropLife International - a global network of associations in 91 countries working together towards sustainable agriculture.*

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