

Transparency and dialogue needed to figure out solutions in GMO labeling debates

In all countries in which genetically modified (GM) food is sold, such as Australia and the US, the issue of food labelling has been hotly debated. While consumer and anti-GM groups call for better labelling of GM foods, the food industry's position is that our labelling system is good enough to allow people to choose whether to eat GM foods.

Meanwhile, consumers are confused and frustrated. So what is needed?

While foods produced using gene technology on our supermarket shelves have been approved as safe to eat by Food Standards Australia New Zealand, we know that people do not choose their food based primarily on science, if at all. Our food choices are a reflection of our experiences, broader society, religion, traditions and culture among other factors.

Nowadays, many of us in western societies are being asked to consider the impact of our food choices on the environment and other people. Celebrity chefs and others encourage us to buy local, sustainable, organic, animal welfare-friendly and often GM-free products, without ever really explaining why. These labels have become a proxy for quality; shorthand for "good food" in a busy world.

Research has shown that people tend to develop simple binaries (such as good/bad, natural/artificial) when choosing foods in the face of confusing information, and adapt the new information on the label to fit within decision frameworks which are more familiar to them.

Our preliminary research suggests that consumers see GM as an additive, and hence avoid processed foods or purchase organic foods, to avoid GM.

Although the current labelling regime is insufficient to fulfil some consumers' demands, questions remain about what information should be mandated, and in what form, to allow consumers to make the decisions that they wish to make as well as consideration of whose interests such labels would serve.

What is clear is that more dialogue and transparency are necessary if consumers are to actively participate in food labelling debates.

Read the full, original article: [Making a meal of GM food labelling](#)