

On GMO labeling: Are consumers getting label fatigue?

Shoppers are shelling out a lot of money for products they believe are good because of clever marketing, labeling, and claims they don't understand. Some of them are happy to pay more for products they believe to be better than others. It helps them feel good about the choices they are making for their families. And it helps keep food companies fat. But this isn't going to last.

Recently, we asked 300 consumers around the country about their knowledge and understanding of the foods they buy. To my surprise, 76 percent of respondents said they were more concerned today than they were three years ago about the food they eat. But only 30 percent of them could define the meaning of an "organic" product. A majority said they were concerned about GMOs — and those who buy non-GMO products pay a premium for them — but only 24 percent knew the meaning of "GMO," or genetically modified organisms. (By the way, all certified organic products are non-GMO. But a product labeled "non-GMO" isn't necessarily organic.)

Is ignorance bliss when it comes to food buying? Not necessarily. There are signs of growing skepticism and label fatigue in the market. We found that 72 percent of shoppers believe some food labels and terms are meaningless. Twelve percent are outright disbelieving of company claims. Marketers beware: How much longer will consumers continue to pay a premium for products with an unclear or, worse, a misleading promise?

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