



# Genetic modification the consumers' voice

: GENETIC MODIFICATION REPORT

the Co-operative Group

# Key findings



55% of people were against GM food and crops with 38% yet to be convinced of its benefits

78% of people have yet to be convinced that the commercial growing of GM crops should be allowed in the UK

51% of people continue to have concerns about the potential long term impact of GM on the environment

78% remain unconvinced that GM is safe to eat

79% would not knowingly buy food containing GM ingredients

61% would not eat GM food even if it was proved safe to eat

30% thought independent scientists were the most trustworthy source for information

NOP World survey conducted over the weekend of 18/19 October 2003 with 1,574 customers and members of Co-op supermarkets and The Co-operative Bank. These results are based on 1,183 respondents who claimed to have some awareness of GM.

# Foreword

As a consumer-owned business, genetic modification (GM) is of great importance and interest to the Co-operative Group. We are a major food retailer, Britain's biggest farmer and owner of The Co-operative Bank.

We wanted to find out exactly what our customers and our members thought about the issues surrounding the GM debate, so their views could be taken into account as we make our own stance on this crucial issue.

It is clear that the uncertainty surrounding the results of the Government's crop trials, and the national debate over the issue has left people feeling at best uneasy over the technology.

Our own national opinion poll, the first since the results of the field trials were published, reveals over half our customers and members are against GM food and crops, and over three-quarters are yet to be convinced that the commercial growing of GM crops should be allowed in the UK.

People are highly sceptical and are not convinced of the possible benefits. They fear a long term risk to the environment and health.

Since 1999 the Co-operative Group has taken steps to ensure that Co-op brand food in our 1,800 stores does not contain any ingredients or additives from GM sources. Co-op brand pork, poultry and eggs come from animals fed on non-GM feed, with more ranges to be introduced soon. We require our suppliers to use Identity Preserved Sources, which enables ingredients to be traced back to non-GM crops.

In addition, The Co-operative Bank, which has two million customers, will not invest in GM technology where there is a conflict with the concerns of its customers.

Now, having listened to the experts on both sides of the debate and the views of our customers and members, we are giving a further commitment. On the strength of current scientific knowledge and the overwhelming opposition of our members, the Co-op is saying 'no' to the commercial growing of GM crops in the UK.

And, we would urge other consumer-led businesses to follow this precautionary approach. Too little is still understood about this technology and how it would impact on the environment in future generations. Let the science and research continue, but, unless, or until, the case is convincingly made, the Government has a responsibility to keep the lid on commercial growing.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Martin Beaumont". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being more prominent.

**Martin Beaumont**, chief executive, the Co-operative Group

# The Survey

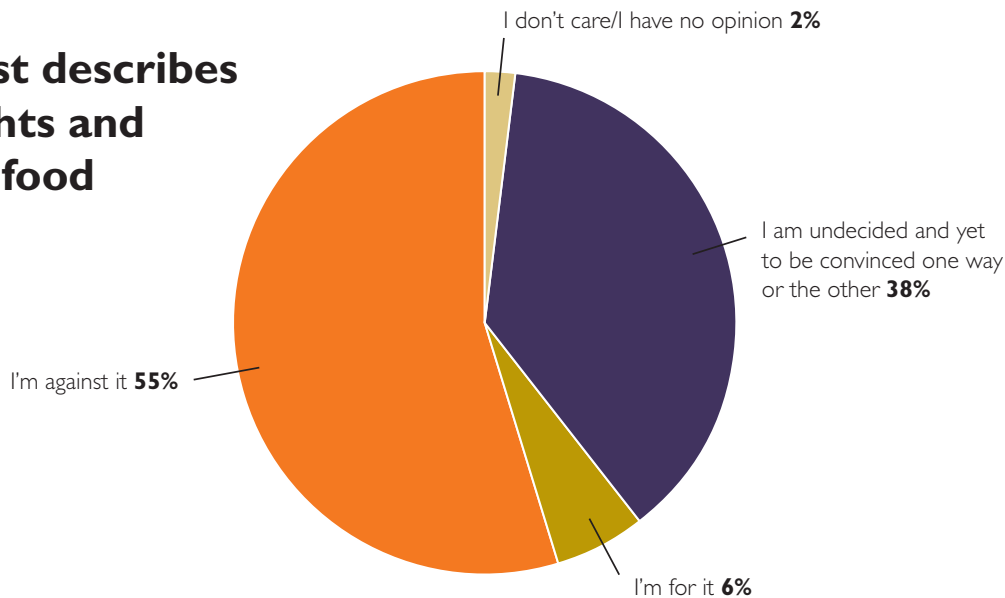
As a co-op owned by our customer-members, it's vital they are given the opportunity to shape the way we do business. That's why within days of the Government announcing the results of its GM crop trials in October, an NOP World survey of Co-op customers and members was carried out. The results below, which have informed the stance we have taken on GM, are based on the responses of 1,183 respondents who said they were aware of the issues surrounding GM.

# The Results

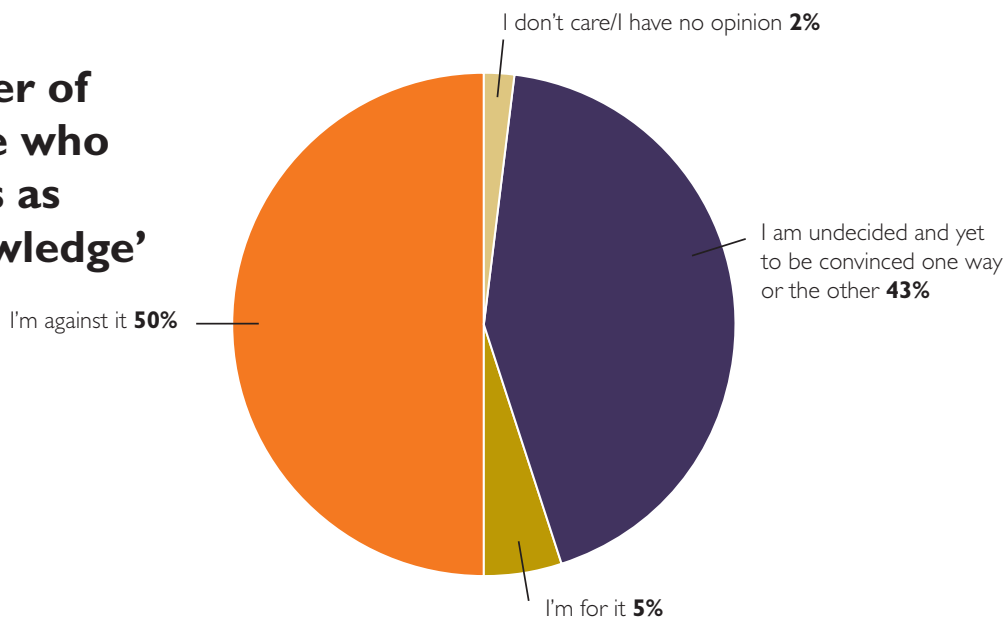
We asked...

**Which of these best describes your overall thoughts and feelings about GM food and crops?**

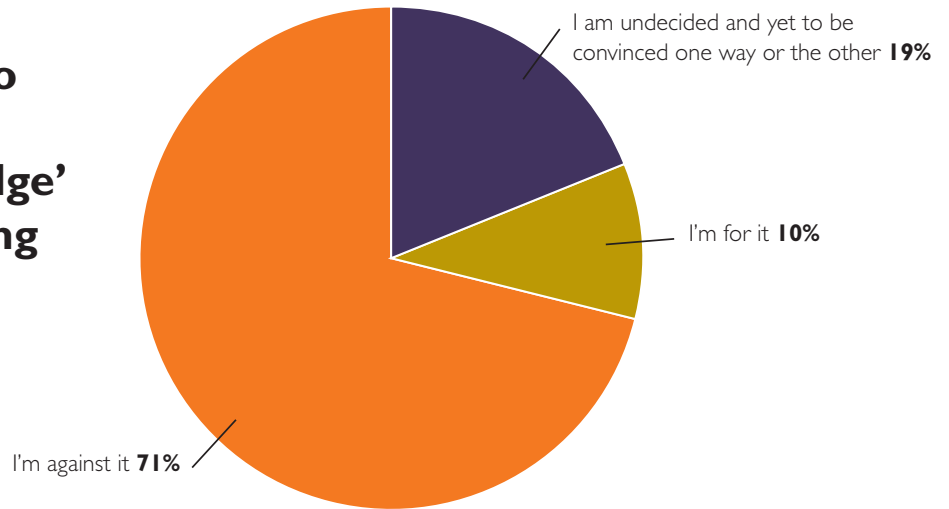
Our survey said...



**Of the total number of people asked those who classed themselves as having 'a little knowledge' of the issues surrounding GM said...**



**Of the total number of people asked those who classed themselves as having ‘a lot of knowledge’ of the issues surrounding GM said...**



**Of those who had told us they were ‘for’ or ‘against’ GM food and crops we asked why they held this stance.**

Our survey said...

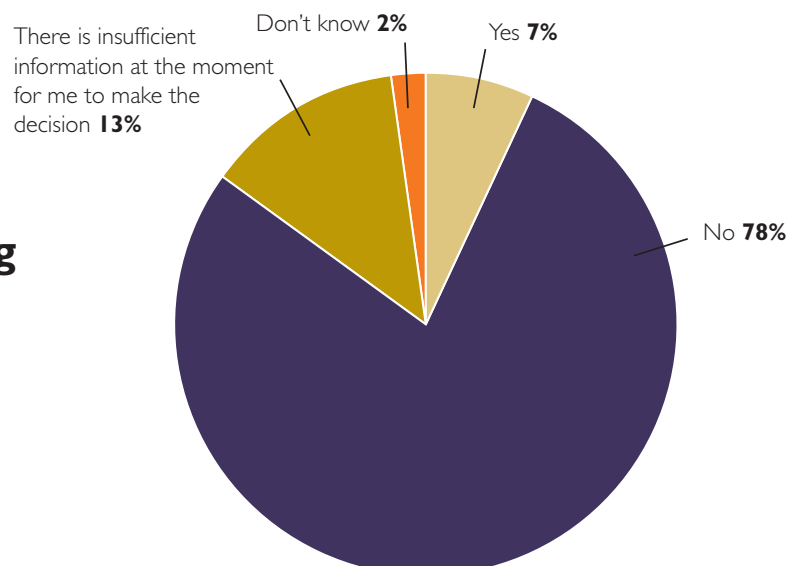
I don't think they harm the environment	9%
Food might be cheaper	2%
Use less pesticides	4%
UK won't lose out to countries that allow growing GM	3%
More profit for farmers	1%
Better crop yields/more efficient farming	5%
Potential long term impacts on the environment	51%
Potential long term impacts on health	36%
Concern that business may be promoting the technology for its own ends	6%
The potential impacts on organic farming	12%
The lack of consensus on the issue	12%
The potential impact on small farmers both in the UK and elsewhere	6%
Don't Know	1%
No answer	6%

Each respondent could choose more than one of the above answers – sample 719 people.

We asked...

**Have you been convinced that commercially growing GM crops should be allowed in the UK?**

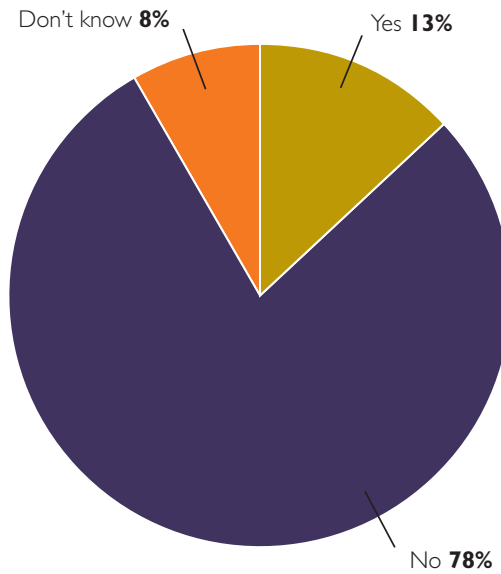
Our survey said...



We asked...

**Have you been convinced that GM food is safe to eat?**

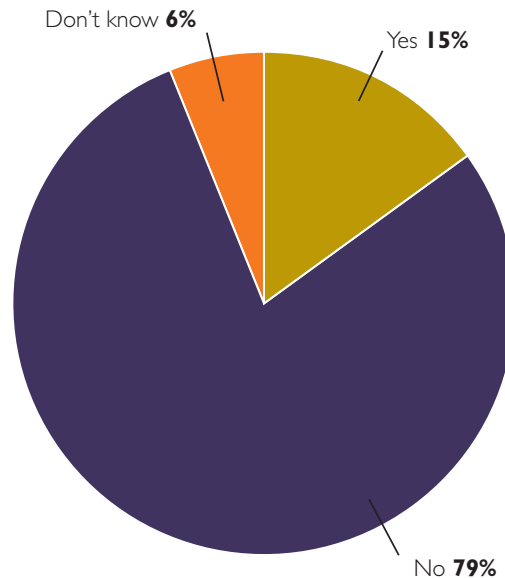
Our survey said...



We asked...

**Would you knowingly buy food containing GM ingredients?**

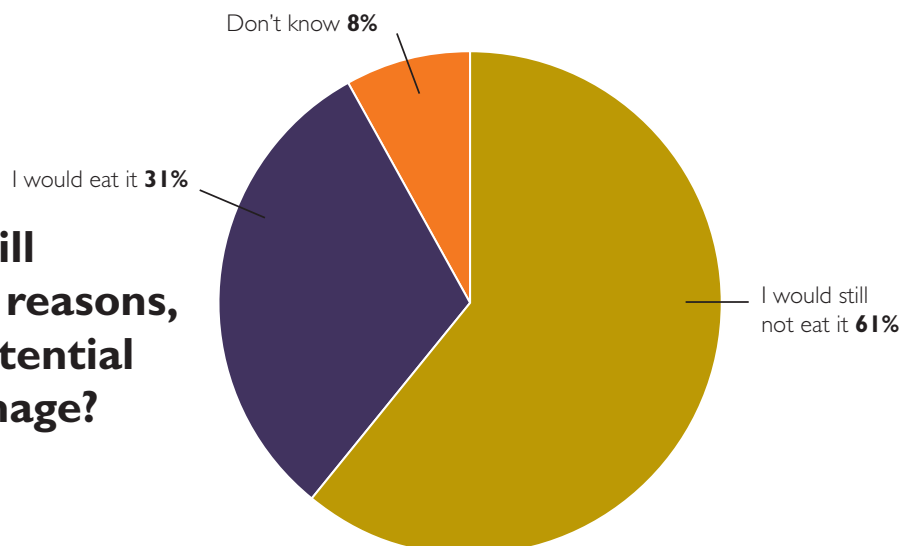
Our survey said...



We asked...

**If GM food were proved to be safe to eat would you still not eat it for other reasons, for example the potential environmental damage?**

Our survey said...



We asked...

## Who would you trust to tell you whether GM food was safe to grow and eat?

Our survey said...

UK Government	13%
Food Standards Agency	10%
Independent scientists	30%
Food manufacturers	3%
Farmers	9%
Campaigning organisations (such as Friends of the Earth or Greenpeace)	12%
None of these	33%
Other	17%

## The Co-operative Group

As well as being a food retailer with around 1,800 stores throughout the country, The Co-operative Bank, Co-operative Insurance Society (CIS), Travelcare, Co-op Pharmacy, Co-operative Funeralcare and Priory Motor Group are also part of the Co-operative Group. We employ over 70,000 people and in 2002 our sales topped £7.7bn.

**As we are a co-op, our members own us – they shape the way we do business and meeting their needs and working with them to improve the communities we all share, are our top priorities.**

If you become a consumer-member, you're showing your support for the way we do business and when it comes to responsible retailing, the Co-op didn't jump on the bandwagon, we are the bandwagon!

For example, we haven't tested any of our own-brand toiletries or household products on animals since 1985, we are the UK's leading Fairtrade retailer, The Co-operative Bank was the first in the industry to launch an ethical policy, in 2001 we became the first retailer to introduce Braille on own-brand medicines and in 2002 we launched Britain's first fully degradable plastic carrier bag.

That's by no means all we've done and to find out more you can log on to [www.co-op.co.uk](http://www.co-op.co.uk)

If we sound like your kind of business, why not show your support by becoming a member? It's easy to join and for the £1 membership cost you get a host of exclusive benefits, including money off holidays and on our online off licence. We also organise events – anything from Co-op wine and food tastings to conferences on issues that matter to our members – like GM!

You can join via our website or call 0800 0686 727, or pick up an application form from your local store.

**A business you can be part of, a business you can be proud of!**

## Access for all

The Co-op customer relations team can provide publications in Braille, large print and on cassette. There is also a Freephone Minicom for those who are deaf or hard of hearing.

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