



GMOs in the restaurant food chain A CUSTOMER SURVEY

Beyond GM, April 2017



SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

In March 2017 **Beyond GM** initiated a survey to find out more about UK customers' attitudes to GMOs in the restaurant and catering food chain. The survey on which this short report is based was conducted online over 6 weeks in March and April 2017.

The headline findings are:

- 82% of respondents said they did not believe GMOs were safe to eat.
- The majority of those surveyed (97%) believed that chefs and caterers should include information about GMO ingredients, including GM fed livestock products, on menus and websites.
- A majority (84%) said they would consider paying more for a meal that was guaranteed GMO-free.
- A majority (82%) said they believed that GMOs deserved greater consideration as part of traceability, sustainability and provenance issues in the food chain.
- In addition to concerns about food safety and health, respondents expressed a number of reasons why they do not want to eat GMOs. These were that GMOs: encourage corporate control of the food system (91%); support unsustainable industrial and factory farming (87%); cause environmental damage (85%); involve too many scientific unknowns (82%); raises concerns for animal welfare (74%); conflicts with religious or personal beliefs (33%); and other issues (27%).

Those other issues included the risks it poses to non-GM and organic crops particularly from cross pollination, the higher use of herbicides and insecticides on GM crops, loss of knowledge of traditional ways of growing food and managing pests, loss of crop diversity and loss of consumer choice.

- When asked what they would do if they saw that a restaurant menu indicated the presence of GMO ingredients the majority (56%) said they would find somewhere else to eat. Another large group (34%) said they would consider eating in that restaurant if guaranteed GMO-free options were available. Similar proportions (5% and 5% respectively) said they would either eat there but unhappily (and be unlikely to return), or that they had no problem eating GMOs.
- Respondents frequented a wide variety of establishments including: table service restaurants (87%); pubs (56%); coffeehouses (51%); take away restaurants (50%); hotel restaurants (33%); street food outlets (32%); and home delivery services (27%).

A smaller proportion of respondents (13% and 7% respectively) frequently ate at workplace or school cafeterias.

Respondents were also asked what their message about GMOs to chefs, caterers, hoteliers and others in the food service industry was. These comments are summarised in Appendix 2 and clearly place genetic modification at the heart of concerns about health, environment and sustainability.

Despite the fact that it is a legal requirement for catering outlets to state whether they use GMO derived ingredients, the issue of genetic engineering technology has, in general, dropped off the radar of restaurants and the food services sector.

The results of this survey indicate that this technology is a key concern for significant numbers of people who eat out and that, moreover, it is a totemic issue for many diners. As such it should be a prominent concern in relation to sustainability, health and food quality when considering provenance.

Furthermore, at a time when new types of GMOs – for instance synthetic biology versions of common ingredients such as vanilla, saffron, stevia, coconut and cocoa and a variety of other flavourings and fragrances – are being aimed and marketed at the food service sector, people within this sector must respond to the challenge of raising their awareness and understanding of the technology and the issues around it.

Awareness and unease

Customer trust is an extremely valuable commodity for any business. Those in the food service industry should be aware that, apart from concrete concerns about issues like health and safety, surveys (ours and others') on GMOs consistently show that the general public does not trust genetically modified food and that this food technology engenders in them a sense of genuine unease.

The most recent large scale independent survey of public attitudes towards genetic engineering technology is now several years old but its findings remain valid and relevant.

The **Eurobarometer opinion poll** carried out in 2010 found that nearly 60% of Europeans believe that GM food is not safe for their health and that of their family or for future generations. An even larger majority (70%) said that genetically modifying foods is “fundamentally unnatural”, and 61% said that GMOs made them “feel uneasy”.

Overall it found that as many as 95% of European respondents rated GMO foods as potentially unsafe and lacking real benefits.

The Eurobarometer survey also revealed equally strong opposition to animal cloning for food, with only 18% of people in favour.

The survey highlighted that there was widespread awareness about GM food (84%). A key finding related to this was that, contrary to what proponents of GM crops claim, Europeans understand the difference between biotechnology and genetic engineering of food, and strongly reject only the latter.

More recently, in 2013, these sentiments were echoed in the UK, when the Food Standards Agency published the second wave of its **Food and You survey**.

Asked about awareness of new food technologies used in food production, respondents reported being most aware of genetic modification (80%); 64% of people were aware of animal cloning, 34% of irradiation and 20% of nanotechnology.

A majority of people felt uneasy about the use of these technologies in food: 66% being uneasy about animal cloning, 52% about genetic modification, and 51% about irradiation. 34% of people expressed concern about nanotechnology even though it is relatively new and not widely known.

Almost since the advent of genetic engineering the food industry, the research establishment and parts of the media have been saying that the public is becoming more accepting of the technology. However, there is no credible independent evidence for this wishful thinking.

The most recent independent survey was a 2014 **YouGov poll** which investigated whether people's attitudes to GMOs were becoming more favourable. Only 6% of the public reported their views towards GM foods becoming "more positive" over the last 12 months, virtually identical to the 5% who said their views had become more negative.

As for those whose views hadn't changed at all, they remained decisively negative: 41% negative to 17% positive. A large proportion (31%) also responded "don't know" when asked how their views on GM have evolved.

In addition 40% believed that the government should not be promoting the adoption of GM, while just 22% believed that they should.

Survey limitations

We do not claim that our survey is comprehensive and we readily acknowledge its limitations.

The survey numbers were relatively small (556 respondents) and the male female split showed a bias towards women. For instance, the demographics of the UK as a whole are 49% men and 51% women; in our survey 37% were men and 63% women.

The majority of respondents were over 25, with the greatest proportion of these being over 45 years of age, and the distribution of age ranges tended towards a greater number of aged 45+ individuals than found in the UK demographic: 72% compared to a **national average** of 34%.

The survey was disseminated through a variety of channels including our own newsletter and social media and via other supportive organisations such as Sustain, The Sustainable Restaurant Association, Sustainable Food Cities and Slow Food. It was also flagged up in an article in *Hospitality and Catering News* as well as in *Natural Products News* and the *Ecologist* magazine.

For this reason our survey group is likely to be more aware and potentially better informed about GMOs than the average individual (though it's worth noting that concern about the safety of eating GMOs does generally rise in those who are better informed about genetic engineering).

However, in terms of negativity towards GMOs in the food chain, our results are in line with a number of larger, broader-based surveys in the UK.

For instance, in 2012 BBC *Countryfile Magazine* launched an open poll which posed the question: **Should GM crop trials be allowed to go ahead?** The online survey returned 7824 responses, 79% (6144) of whom said no and 21% (1680) said yes.

An open poll in the *Guardian* newspaper online reported in 2013 that **72% of readers said they do not believe GM food is either safe or beneficial**. Six months later the *Guardian* ran another online open poll – should restrictions on GM crops be relaxed? In this poll **71% said no**.

We are confident, therefore, that even with these limitations, our results generally agree with, and support, the findings of other public surveys.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

There is a broad measure of agreement that issues of health, nutrition and sustainability are becoming increasingly important to customers of restaurants and other dining venues.

The Sustainable Restaurant Association report *The Discerning Diner*, for example, highlights customer health and nutrition as the joint top concern (with food waste) of diners (53%) with issues such as local sourcing, animal welfare and seasonality also registering as prominent concerns.

In this report not using genetically modified food is specified as an expectation of significant numbers of diners in a range of restaurant types: 56% of diners where a meal costs £30 or more, 40% of diners where a meal costs between £10 and £20, and notably, 29% where a meal costs less than £10.

Answers to our survey question about the reasons why, in addition to health/safety concerns, people wish to avoid GM foods suggest that GM is seen as a part – arguably a totemic part – of a suite of sustainability issues that are influencing eating choices.

Given that our respondents frequented a wide variety of dining out venues, it is clear that these issues are not restricted to a narrow band of culturally elite venues and have relevance to a wide range of people.

Similarly, the messages which our respondents wished to get across to chefs, caterers and others in the food service industry (see Appendix 2) make it clear that the reasons for not wanting to eat GMOs are firmly grounded in issues of sustainability, ecology, ethics and animal welfare.

For those in food service this means that the issue of GMOs is unlikely to be easily swept under the carpet of soothing words and phrases that have become known as ‘greenwash’.

What is more, there is every reason to believe that responding thoughtfully and proactively to concerns about GMOs, as part of responding to customers’ concerns about sustainability, is good business as well as being good practice for health and the environment.

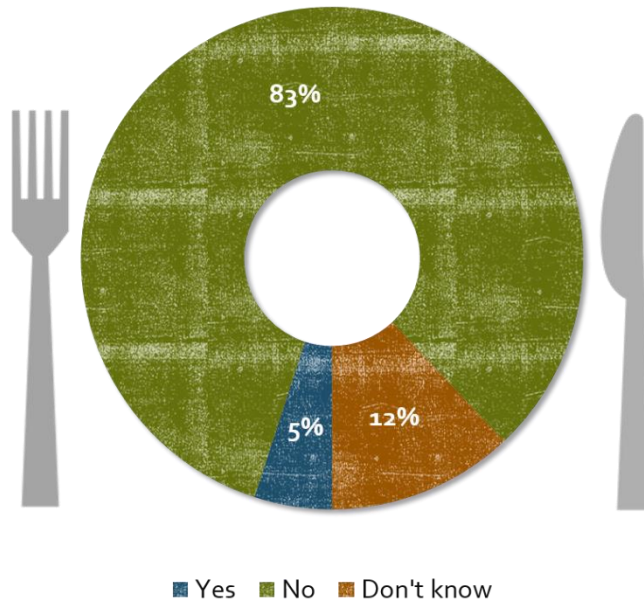
ABOUT BEYOND GM

Beyond GM is an ambitious and creative movement building catalyst. Through a broad range of activities, focused campaigns, social media and literature we educate, campaign, engage with and inform the general public about the inherent problems of genetically modified farming and food and the importance of moving “beyond GM’ to develop the potential of agro-ecological alternatives to industrial farming and food systems.

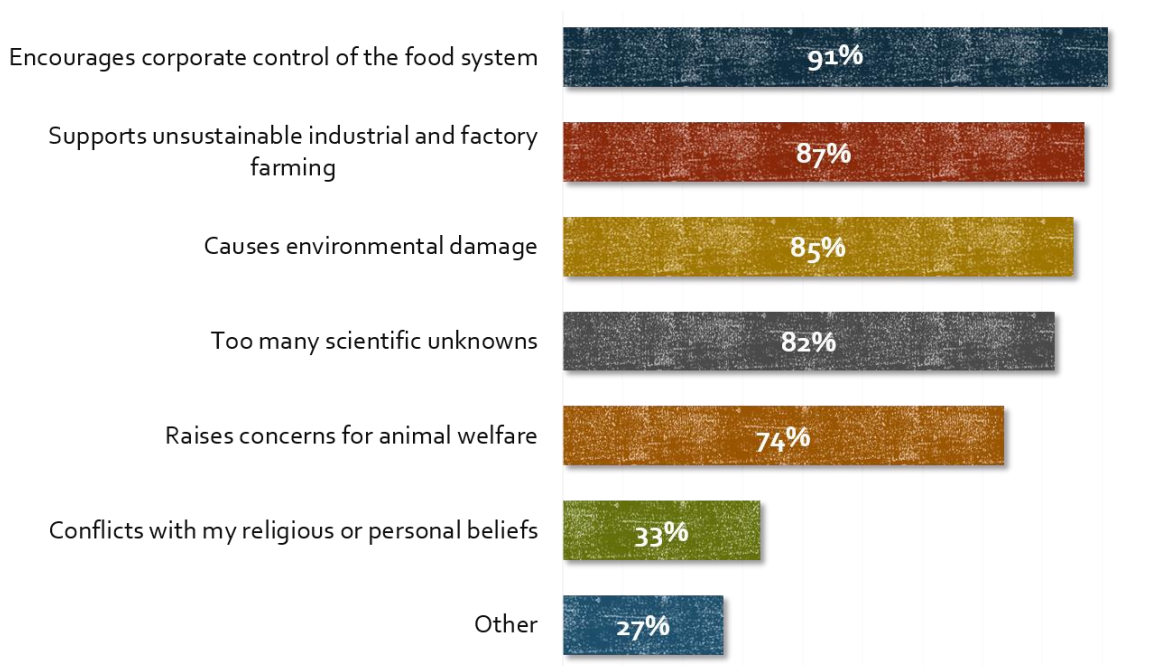
- Find out more about us at: <http://www.beyond-gm.org>
- Contact us at: info@beyond-gm.org

APPENDIX 1 – SURVEY RESULTS

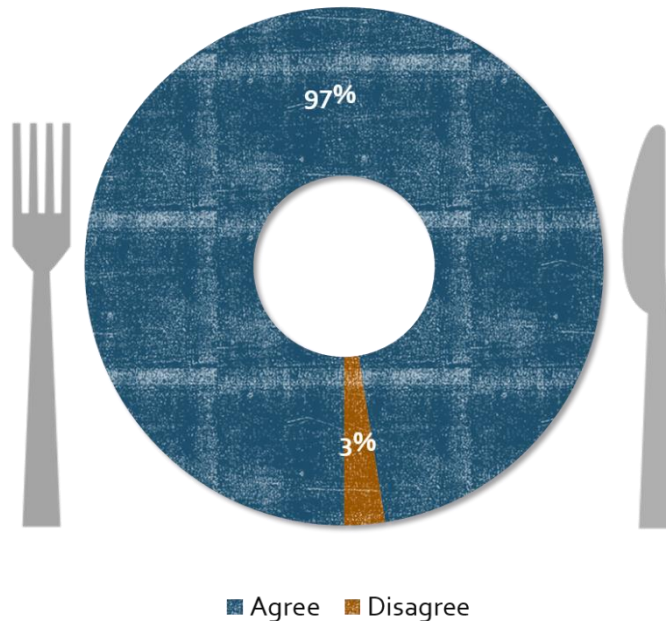
Q1. Do you believe GMOs are safe to eat?



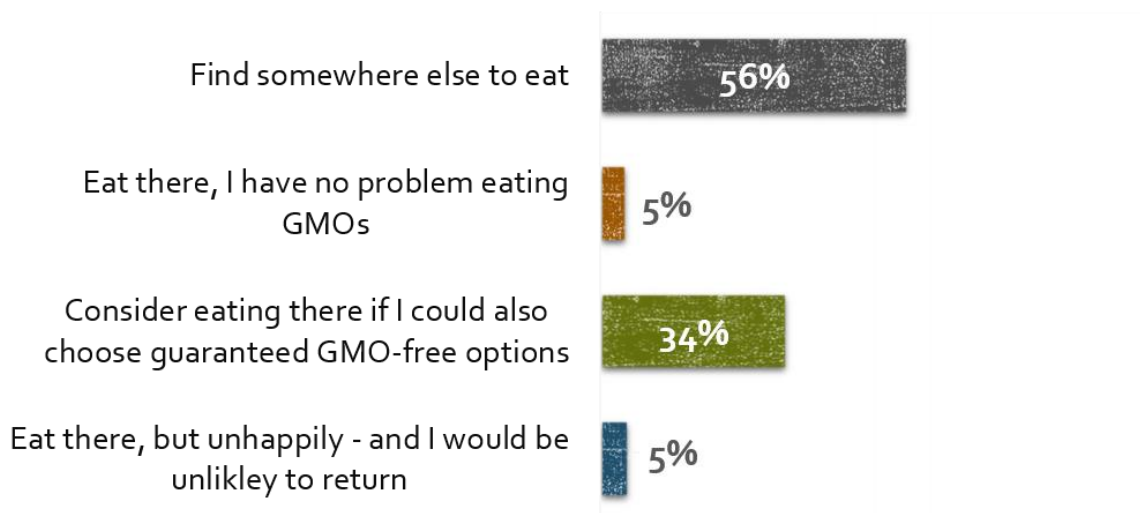
Q2 – Apart from safety, are there other reasons why you would not want to eat genetically modified food?



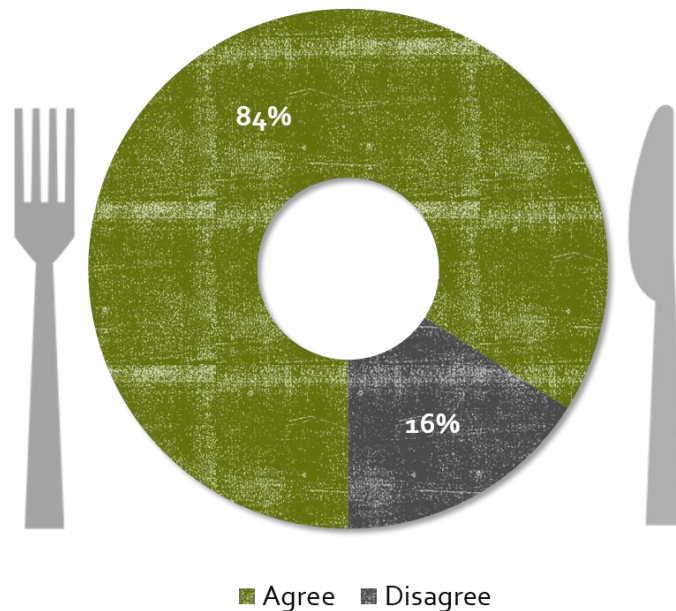
Q3. Chefs and caterers who use genetically modified ingredients, including meat and dairy from GM-fed livestock, should indicate this clearly on menus and websites.



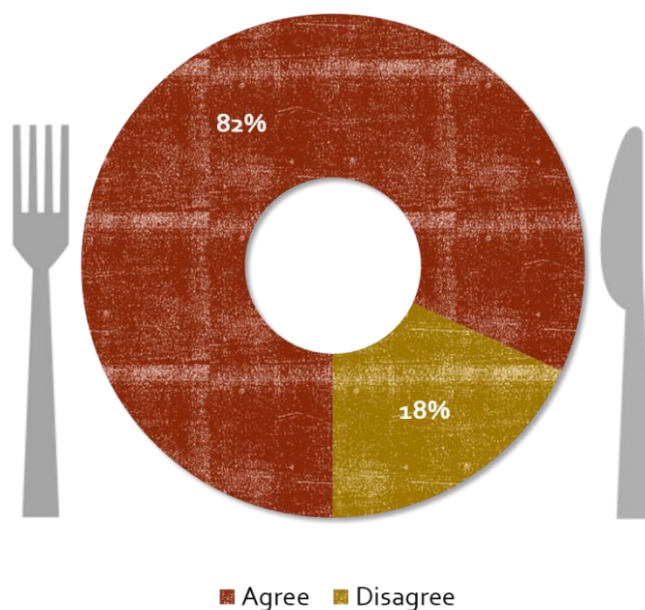
Q4. If an establishment's menu indicated that GMO ingredients were used, would you:



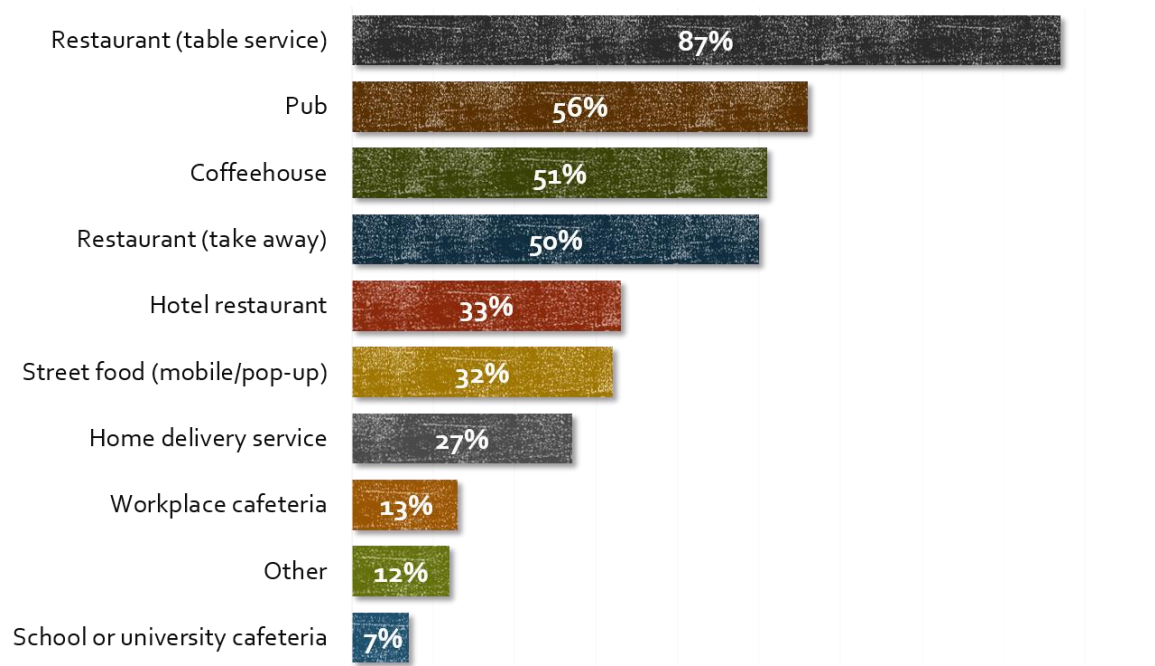
Q5. I would consider paying more for a meal that was guaranteed to be GMO-free.



Q6. As a customer I believe that GMOs deserve greater consideration as part of traceability, sustainability and provenance issues in the food chain.



Q7. When you eat out, which of the following do you patronise?



Q8. My message about GMOs to chefs, caterers, hoteliers and others in the food service industry is:

For select comments see appendix 2.



APPENDIX 2 – MESSAGES

Question 8 in our survey asked respondents to leave a message to chefs, caterers and other in the foodservice industry. We had a large and varied response to this. We include select comments that sum up the recurring themes below.

Educate yourselves...it's important to us!

I'm shocked that more chefs etc. don't take the time to understand the issues and stand up for a really sustainable food system.

Think about how our choices now affect the future.

You are at the forefront and should demand the best and purest ingredients.

Please use ingredients with a provenance to be proud of – natural, free of pesticides (whether added or engineered) and ethically sourced.

Clearly state whether or not you use GM ingredients. I would much prefer to eat animals that have been treated well and organic produce, so am much more likely to patronise restaurants that care about these things too.

Ensure you provide clear choices to your customers so they can make informed choices about what they eat.

Leave it out!

Try and get a truly balanced view on GMOs. Err on the side of caution. Most people seem to have a natural distrust of them. They are your customers.

Consider emulating San Carlo in Birmingham whose window message is that their suppliers assure them that their ingredients are GM free.

Get ahead of the game in supporting non-GMO food before it's you or the company you work for losing out in the long-term as awareness increases.

This is an important issue that needs addressing along with other sustainability issues – let's change the world!

Change the way you purchase your food.

Keep that gunk out of my food!!

Customers have a right to know...and will no doubt prove that, given a choice, they would prefer to avoid GMOs.

Keep GMOs out of the food chain! I don't want to encourage the cultivation of GM crops by eating dairy and meat products fed GMOs.

Don't! Not enough is known about the effects and food shouldn't be mucked about with. Stick to fresh, natural and local produce.

Don't use GMOs! And if you do, you need to label them! I am sick of finding empty GM oil cans outside restaurants & cafes that are not labelling this on their menus – as required by law!

You can be leaders and heroes of a culture, of good husbandry and farming, and real love of good food. Or we can all end up not knowing what we are eating, because GM will get everywhere.

We eat and drink together so we need to start including alcohol spirits in this messaging too. e.g. corn neutral grain spirits is used for gin, bourbon etc. See **Brown Forman public announcement that there are not enough non-GMO ingredients so they are now making their spirits using GM ingredients. The same is starting to happen in the UK.**

Let us know what we are eating!

I do not want GMOs on my plate. I will gladly pay more for 'clean' food.

Please think hard about the harm that GMOs will be doing to the environment, to animal health, and quite possibly to human health as well.

If you want my business, offer me non-GMO meals.

My main issue with GMOs is that they are continuing bad farming practises, increasing chemical usage, and ruining soil levels. If we continue on a non-organic farming path we will definitely not be able to feed a growing global population.

Get behind this campaign, if you really love good and healthy food. GMOs are not needed, they only benefit the agribusiness and nobody else.

I would like to believe that farmers, chefs, restaurants care about the nutrition and healthfulness of the food they offer. I believe the public would respond to healthier food choices even if it costs a bit more than the unhealthy food that is presented to us.

I will be seeking out places to eat where non GM food is guaranteed. I hope you will be among those who supply it.