Legge (2010) European Attitudes toward Genetically Modified Foods

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The production and consumption of genetically modified (GM) foods is a controversial topic in the European Union. Biotechnology has led to the production of food products that have been genetically modified, allowing the products to be produced more efficiently while causing less damage to the environment. Crops can be modified to contain traits that would prevent the need for pesticides, improve shelf life and nutrition, and offer protection against natural disasters. Despite the benefits of GM foods, fear exists about potential health risks and possible damage to the environment. Jerome S. Legge Jr. and Robert F. Durant explore the factors that lead to support or rejection of GM foods and offer an in depth analysis as to which people are most likely to support this biotechnology.

It is not surprising that there are people who are uncomfortable with the idea of GM foods. A large number of people are unsure about what genetically modifying food actually entails, leading to uncertainty about the actual benefits that can be gained from its production and consumption. This lack of knowledge leads to hesitation in accepting the production of GM foods, despite supporters’ claims of the benefits. Through the use of a survey administered during November-December 2005 in the European Union, Legge and Durant were able to show that people who are knowledgeable about GM foods are more likely to support its production than those who lack sufficient knowledge about the subject.

Support for GM foods was also found among people who lack in depth knowledge, but trust experts as well as the EU and national governments. People focus more on trust in the EU and national governments than trust in the media. In a time when people heavily rely on technology on a daily basis, it is surprising that people have not begun to accept everything the media suggests as true and accurate.

The amount of time spent as a nation in the EU does not have an effect on whether or not the people of those nations are supportive of GM foods, as the authors originally suspected. Legge and Durant hypothesized that newer nations in the EU had less time to develop mistrust in the government, and would therefore be more likely to trust the government’s decision about the production and consumption of GM foods. This theory seems logical, but surprisingly, the wealth of the nation is more important in determining support. The production of GM foods can be done with higher crop yields at a lower cost, which appeals to the poorer, less developed nations of the European Union. The need for a cheap, consistent source of food is an important factor considered by people in these nations when weighing the pros and cons of GM foods.

This article is an excellent source for background knowledge about factors that may influence a person’s support or rejection of GM foods. It provides a solid foundation on which more in depth research can be done on individual factors that affect a person’s comfort with the idea of GM foods.