



Montclair State Researchers Examine New Jersey Consumers' Attitudes Toward Genetically Modified Food Products

Study finds that GMO labeling, such as that required by a recently proposed New Jersey bill, would help consumers make more fully informed purchasing decisions

Montclair, NJ. January 8, 2014 – Do New Jersey consumers have the information they need to make informed decisions about genetically modified foods? This is the question posed by Montclair State University Health and Nutrition Sciences researchers Shahla Wunderlich, Charles Feldman and Melissa Vecchione in their study “Consumer Knowledge and the Attitudes about Genetically Modified Food Products and Labeling Policy,” which was published online by the *International Journal of Food Sciences and Nutrition* in December.

The study, which is the result of nearly three years of research, establishes a strong correlation between the attitudes of New Jersey supermarket customers toward foods that do not contain genetically modified organisms, or GMOs, and their purchasing behaviors.

It concludes that GMO labeling, such as that required by a recently proposed New Jersey bill, would help consumers make more fully informed purchasing decisions.

“There is a positive correlation between consumer attitudes toward foods not containing GMOs and purchasing behaviors,” noted Health and Nutrition Sciences Professor Wunderlich. “It is clear that consumers need more education regarding current food production systems that rely on GMOs.”

“The most dominating force in the food marketplace is the consumer,” said Feldman, a professor in the University’s Health and Nutrition Sciences Department. “Consumer preferences have a great impact on industry practice – even more so, perhaps, than government policy. Therefore, consumers should take an interest in finding out about the ingredients of the foods they eat. Their voice is the best food protection apparatus.”

While GMOs are tightly regulated and frequently banned in Europe, in the United States, GMO foods are probably here to stay – at least for the time being. “Production of these foods is

currently more efficient and therefore more profitable for industrialized food companies,” Wunderlich explained. “Many consumers are unaware that nearly 75 to 80 percent of packaged or processed food items on supermarket shelves contain some GMO ingredients.”

According to Wunderlich, corn and soybeans are the most common genetically modified foods. “Corn in the form of corn syrup is present in many processed foods, hence the high overall percentage of foods in the United States that contain GMO components,” she said.

The study suggests that New Jersey consumers act more on their attitudes toward GMO foods than specific knowledge about them. “I think the most important finding of our research is that consumers’ feelings toward GMOs do impact what they eat,” said Melissa Vecchione, who received her Master of Science in Nutrition and Food Science and Post-Baccalaureate Certification in Dietetics in May 2014. “I believe most consumers want to know what’s in their food. Labeling would give them more of a choice and help them make more informed purchasing decisions based on their feelings toward GMOs.”

Montclair State University

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