

Consumer Attitudes towards Emerging Technologies

Area of research interest: [Behaviour and perception](#)

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Background

The technologies covered by the Rapid Evidence Assessment were genetically modified (GM) foods, nanotechnology applied to foods, functional foods, cultured meat, novel food (in the UK) such as insect foods, food from a cloned animal, 3D printed foods and synthetic biology applied to foods.

Four public dialogue events took place in Wigston, Swansea, and Belfast and London. The public dialogue events further explored the views of members of the public towards four of these technologies: GM foods, nanotechnology in foods, food from cloned animals and cultured meat.

The research looked at:

- How acceptable do consumers find these technologies, and what shapes these views
- How this varies by demographics and technology type
- How views have changed over time

Key findings

- Across all the technologies examined no single picture emerges of consumer views. This is partly because of the inherent variability of the different technologies and partly because of the lack of systematic studies on consumer views.
- General awareness of food technologies is low, this is the case even for those that have been in the media over the past 20 years such as cloning.
- Key concerns that arise across technologies are perceptions of 'unnaturalness', potential impacts on health, animal welfare, farming and the environment. Lack of trust in the motivations of those promoting these technologies also led to concern.
- Perceived benefits of these technologies include higher yields which are required for a growing population, reduced use of pesticides, extended shelf life, reduced waste and improved quality.
- Attitudes toward a food technology can also vary depending on the type of application and the context.
- Ambivalence in views is common as both positive and negative views are held at the same time.
- Price has an impact. Consumers were more willing to buy GM food if it were available at a reasonable price and less willing to buy food involving nanotechnology if it were more expensive, even if it had health benefits.

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