Genetically modified crops

Do you think that consumers/retailers have become more or less receptive to genetically modified food over the last two years?

On balance, respondents think that consumers are becoming more receptive to genetically modified food. Sentiment appears to be shifting in the developed world, certain parts of which, for example the EU, have shown firm resistance to GMOs over the years.

Respondents recognise that in the poorer and less developed parts of the world people do not have the same luxury of choice between genetically modified food and conventionally grown crops and are simply concerned about having enough food to survive.

Respondents indicate that attitudes towards genetically modified produce have certainly changed in recent years with a greater use of GMOs in animal feeds. Genetically modified soya is now thought to be prevalent within the industry.

‘GMOs allow us to use less chemicals.’
Mikhail Orlov, Founder and president, Ambika Group

‘Fear of GM food may have waned somewhat in developed countries, but the combination of a lack of understanding about biotechnology and a content-hungry media means we may be only one tweet away from the start of the next “Frankenfood” scare campaign. Public education is key.’
Jenni Hill, Partner, Norton Rose Fulbright Australia

‘Some people care about having food on the table – the less wealthy the region, the less of an issue it is.’
Olaf ter Bille, Global head of hedge trading – dairy platform, Louis Dreyfus Commodities
‘I think it is likely to increase or people will starve. The population is forecast to increase by two billion by 2050, so if we have to feed more people you need an increase... If productivity and yields do not improve, people will starve.’

*Justin Cotter, Regional manager, Rabobank*

Respondents believe that a lack of information about GMOs is at the heart of consumers’ concerns. From an environmental perspective, respondents state that the public need to be better educated about the use of genetically modified farming and agriculture, particularly as it can lead to hardier and more weather resistant crops that rely less on chemicals to withstand the effects of pests and disease.

Despite this, there is still considerable debate in the developed world about GMOs, as illustrated by the heated discussions over the necessity of labelling in North America and recent legislative developments in one US state requiring the labelling of genetically engineered foods. Opponents to this form of agriculture say that labelling should not be necessary if GMOs are absolutely safe.

Respondents suggest that there will be an increase in the use of genetically modified foods or inputs. Only a small proportion (9 per cent) believe that there will be a decrease.

Respondents note that with global population growth, urbanisation and the expanding middle classes, supply will simply not be able to meet demand unless radical changes are made to existing inputs.