



GMO Moratorium Review

GPO Box 44, Hobart TAS 7001

18.4.2019

Dear Review Team,

Eat Well Tasmania Inc. is pleased to have an opportunity to make a submission to the review process for the GMO Moratorium in Tasmania and below is our contribution for your consideration.

Eat Well Tasmania Inc is a not for profit organisation that promotes enjoying Tasmanian food to Tasmanians and visitors to Tasmania, with an emphasis on seasonal produce. We have an independent Board who have formally endorsed our position on the GMO Moratorium. Our mission is "To be an influential and financially sustainable Organisation that promotes opportunities to eat well and adds value to the Tasmanian food sector".<sup>1</sup>

One of our guiding principles is to "Be responsive and tackle the big issues with our partners" so in developing this submission we have in part taken our lead from the two main peak bodies for agriculture and horticulture in Tasmania, the Fruit Growers Tasmania and Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association. Both organisations have publicly declared their support for the continuation of the GMO Moratorium. **Eat Well Tasmania also supports the continuation of the GMO Moratorium.**

The other factor that heavily influenced us in adopting the position of supporting the Moratorium, was a review of literature relating to consumers attitudes both here in Australia and internationally to GMO foods. Our research is not exhaustive, but we have confidence that the research we have presented here demonstrates a clear pattern about consumer/eater attitudes and consequently influences purchasing behaviour and markets for GMO free food.

It is important to note that attitudes to food, production methods and provenance all potentially influence food choices and therefore market demand for food.

**Consumers/ eaters are not demanding GMO food** -Food choice is complex, and GMO status is just one among many characteristics of food that influence purchasing. Influences include, but are not limited to, food being labelled natural, food being produced locally, food being healthy and nutritious, free from additives, convenience and price. Issues and concerns about GMO foods by the community, such as the risks to human health and the

---

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.eatwelltas.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/EWT\\_Strategic-Plan-2018-23\\_P2.pdf](https://www.eatwelltas.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/EWT_Strategic-Plan-2018-23_P2.pdf)

Eat Well Tasmania Inc. GPO Box 1365 Hobart 7001 Leah Galvin State Manager

[www.eatwelltas.org.au](http://www.eatwelltas.org.au) @eatwelltasmania

environment are not well understood and nor are the potential benefits and this influences attitudes to purchasing of GMO food negatively.<sup>2</sup>

**Consumers/ eaters are unsure and very divided about GMO food so changes to the status is not required** - Australian research, including Tasmanians regularly monitors and tracks attitudes to technology. Australians are generally comfortable with the rate of technological advances that are occurring at home and internationally. But these attitudes do not extend to all advances, for example they are comfortable with wind farms, but not nuclear power. When it comes to GMO plants and animals, the degree of comfort is relatively low. Australians are more comfortable with GMO plants (rated at 4.4 on a scale of 10 from least to most comfortable) versus animals (3.1). Forty-nine % of respondents in the Swinburne research are not comfortable with GMO plants and 66% GM animals. Men were significantly more comfortable with GMO plants and animals for food than women, however it is of note that women are still largely the gatekeepers of household nutrition.<sup>3</sup>

Public opinions on the regulatory approaches to GMO in Australian remain mixed. Qualitative research in Adelaide showed there is a variation of beliefs and attitudes depending on levels of education, income and location. But this is not always clear cut. Even within segments of the population that have high levels of education attitudes relating to GMO are divided. For example: people who are literate in plant science are less concerned about GMO, and people with nutrition and health science education prefer non-GMO.<sup>4</sup>

### **Why is the community concerned?**

Research<sup>5</sup> undertaken by the Public Health Association of Australia and shared in their position paper on GMO Food, shows community concerns about GMO differ and concerns include:

- The production of allergens,
- Oversight of GMO monitoring and regulation by multiple government bodies,
- Food labelling not required by FSANZ current regulation despite consumer resistance to consuming GMO foods and strong demand for clear labelling,
- Perceived lack of independence in assessment of safety of GMO,
- Perceived lack of surveillance systems to monitor safety to human health, and
- GMO crops contaminating non-GMO crops and once in the environment cannot be removed.

---

<sup>2</sup> Bray, H & Ankeny R (2017) Not just about 'the science': science education and attitudes to genetically modified foods among women in Australian: *New Genetics and Society*, 36:1, 1-21

<sup>3</sup> Swinburne University of Technology, 2015 *The Swinburne National Technology and Society Monitor*

<sup>4</sup> Bray, H & Ankeny R (2017) Not just about 'the science': science education and attitudes to genetically modified foods among women in Australian: *New Genetics and Society*, 36:1, 1-21

<sup>5</sup> Public Health Association of Australia - Policy at a glance – Genetically Modified Foods Policy 2013, Eat Well Tasmania Inc. GPO Box 1365 Hobart 7001 Leah Galvin State Manager

## GMO food and consistency with the Tasmanian Brand

GMO food is inconsistent with our 'clean and green' brand and could become a brand risk over time due to the negative perceptions held by consumer/eaters. Research<sup>6</sup> conducted by Brand Tasmania demonstrates what the perceptions about Tasmanian food are. The survey in 2016 (participants were 96% Australian and half were Tasmanian) measured perception, descriptors and buyer intent for Tasmania's food and beverages. The most common reasons for purchasing Tasmanian food were quality and a desire to support local producers. When asked to describe Tasmanian food the survey participants responses resulted in the word cluster below. Protecting the value of these perceptions of Tasmanian food should be a key consideration in protecting the Tasmanian brand market value within our domestic markets, mainland Australia and Tasmania, as well as international markets. Our GMO free status is likely a positive point of difference and will be potentially be more valuable in a market environment where consumers/eaters increasingly make purchasing decisions based on their values.<sup>7</sup>



<sup>6</sup> Brand Tasmania, Brand Health Survey Food and Beverage 2016- A summary report of a survey conducted by Brand Tasmania in 2016

<sup>7</sup> <https://foodminds.com/food-thoughts/food-thoughts-items/the-increasing-role-of-food-values-in-food-choice-behaviors/>

## Consumer attitudes in international markets

**“Further GM crops and food could seriously taint the brand position of non-GM Australian produce in Asian markets. We conclude that Australia’s clean, green and safe brand has a market value, and needs to be included along with consumer purchasing behaviour when valuing technological advancements and GM crops on Australian farms” (p 41) <sup>6</sup>**

### China

In the early stages of the introduction of GMO technology, the Chinese public held a positive attitude towards GMO foods <sup>8</sup> and with high percentages of consumers showing they intended to buy GMO foods believing they would personally benefit.<sup>9</sup> At this time only 5% of consumers thought they understood issues concerning GMO foods. In the first decade of the 2000’s awareness of GMO food increased significantly, from 35% in 2004 to 85.3% in 2014.<sup>10</sup> Research conducted in 2014<sup>11</sup>, found Chinese people who have higher levels of income and/or education have negative attitudes to GMO foods. The higher the income or education the more negative the attitude is. Chinese consumers, particularly the middle class which is rapidly growing, value food they perceive to be clean, green and safe. Chinese consumers are generally risk averse, and if they can afford to, prefer to buy non-GMO. They trust Australian products because it is seen as safe and of premium quality.<sup>6</sup>

In our judgement, this consumer analysis shows that on farm production benefits should not be considered in isolation of how consumers perceive GMO in Asia’s biggest market.

With less than 5% of Tasmanian businesses promoting our GMO-free status, there may also be a market advantage to promoting this characteristic more strongly<sup>12</sup>.

---

<sup>8</sup> Asian Food Information Center 2003 Consumer perceptions of food biotechnology in Asia

<sup>9</sup> Marques M & Critchley C & Walshe J, 2015 Attitudes to genetically modified food over time: How trust in organisations and the media cycle predict support: Public Understanding of Science, Vol 24(5) 601-618

<sup>10</sup> Review of Asian Consumer Attitudes Toward GM Food and Implications for Agricultural Technology Development in Australia, 2015 Farm Policy Journal, Vol 12, No3 Spring quarter

<sup>11</sup> Xia, M 2014 Chinese consumers’ attitude towards genetically modified foods – taking genetically modified soybean oil as an example. Journal of Food Processing and Technology, vol 5, p351

<sup>12</sup> <https://grdc.com.au/resources-and-publications/grdc-update-papers/tab-content/grdc-update-papers/2014/08/understanding-the-pros-and-cons-of-tasmanias-gm-status-and-how-it-impacts-tasmanias-farmers>

Eat Well Tasmania Inc. GPO Box 1365 Hobart 7001 Leah Galvin State Manager

[www.eatwelltas.org.au](http://www.eatwelltas.org.au) @eatwelltasmania

## Europe

The European market has become increasingly unfriendly towards GMO foods. The USDA conducts market assessments on behalf of US exporters. Recent assessments have found that both regulation and policy make market conditions for either cropping or importing food ingredients very unlikely for GMO foods. For example, France's 'hostility' towards the adoption of biotechnology in agriculture has increased in the past years, the USDA reports. French retailers refuse to accept GMO foods, and "either avoid labelling through reformulation with biotech-free ingredients or push labelling of products certified as biotech-free".<sup>13</sup>

While in Austria, the parliaments, government decision makers, farmer organisations and consumers, share the opinion that biotechnology carries an incalculable risk. "All major Austrian political parties consistently vote against the use of agricultural biotechnology", while "NGOs and farmer organizations, the food-processing sector, and the retail sector **all have marketing campaigns promoting GMO-free foods.**"<sup>14</sup>

**In summary, Eat Well Tasmania Inc supports continuing the GMO Moratorium because:**

- **the key agriculture and horticulture peak bodies in Tasmanian also do,**
- **consumer research about attitudes towards GMO both here and internationally demonstrates a lack of demand and trust for GMO food,**
- **any change would be inconsistent with important perceptions about Tasmanian food and island brand, and**
- **Being GMO free may create a market advantage and be a point of difference that increases the perceived value of Tasmanian produce.**

---

<sup>13</sup> USDA. 2013. France. Agricultural Biotechnology Annual. GAIN Report FR9140

<sup>14</sup> USDA. 2013. Austria. Agricultural Biotechnology Annual. GAIN Report AU1304

Eat Well Tasmania Inc. GPO Box 1365 Hobart 7001 Leah Galvin State Manager

[www.eatwelltas.org.au](http://www.eatwelltas.org.au) @eatwelltasmania