

Executive Summary

Public Opinion of Food in Florida

NOVEMBER 2013

Introduction

In Florida, and throughout the United States, food related issues such as food safety, food security, and use of new food technologies continue to be top concerns among consumers. Since consumers' opinions regarding food issues is important to both the sustainability of the agricultural industry and human life as we know it, the UF/IFAS Center for Public Issues Education (PIE Center) initiated a study to explore the attitudes, perceptions, and opinions of Floridians around food issues. This survey examined what Floridians think about (1) food security of adults and children in the United States, (2) their concerns regarding food security, (3) their perceptions of food safety of various food products, (4) their concerns regarding food safety, (5) their overall attitude toward food safety, (6) their perceptions of genetically modified organisms (GMOs), (7) their intent to purchase GMO products, and (8) their perception of using genetic modification to develop HLB (citrus greening) resistant Florida citrus.

Key Findings

The key findings of the study include the following

- Florida residents ranked food safety 3rd out of 15 issues, when asked to identify the importance of 15 issues. Food production practices ranked 9th and genetically modified food ranked 14th.
- Food security was identified as an issue facing U.S. adults and children.
- The majority of Florida residents have at least minimal concerns about food running out on a Global and National scale.
- Respondents were more worried about being able to afford food than having access to safe and nutritious food.
- The majority of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that fruits and vegetables were safe.
- Eggs and milk were identified by respondents as the safest animal products, followed by whole cuts of meat (steak, pork chops, chicken), and ground products (ground beef, sausage).
- Respondents were slightly more worried about the safety of growth hormones in food than the safety of bacteria in food.
- About half of respondents reported concerns with the safety of food additives and preservatives, while about half were not worried about food containing gluten.
- When asked about the safety of genetically modified foods and genetically engineered foods, 45% and 44% of respondents indicated that they were moderately or extremely worried.
- The majority of respondents were only slightly or not at all worried about the safety of organic, local, and all natural food.
- The majority of respondents were worried about the safety of pesticide and antibiotic residues in food. Slightly more participants were concerned with the safety of pesticide residues in food.
- Florida residents are more concerned about the safety of food prepared at a restaurant than prepared in their kitchen.
- The majority of respondents reported food safety could be impacted by their food preparation and they could avoid unsafe food when they were careful.

- The most respondents indicated that farmers and supermarkets were doing the best job at protecting food safety, while the least amount of respondents indicated that government agencies, consumers, and food processing corporations were doing a good job.
- The majority of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the quality of food used to be better.
- Just under half of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they had purchased and/or consumed genetically modified food.
- Many participants were unsure (*Neither agree nor disagree*) regarding possible advantages to genetic modification.
- 45% agreed or strongly agreed that genetically modified food presented a greater risk for food allergies and food poisoning, while almost half of respondents (48%) were unsure if genetically modified organisms threaten the environment.
- Many respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed (42%) they would purchase meat from an animal that was fed genetically modified feed, followed by genetically modified produce (38%), and food products containing genetically modified ingredients such as cereal (37%).
- 51% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed they would purchase clothes made from genetically modified fibers.
- 52% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that genetic modification should be used to save citrus trees, while 42% agreed or strongly agreed they would purchase Florida grown genetically modified citrus fruit and juice.