

Executive Summary

Public Opinion of Food in Florida

OCTOBER 2014

Introduction

In Florida and throughout the United States, food-related issues such as food safety 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) their perceptions of food safety of various food products, (2) their concerns regarding food safety, (3) their overall attitude toward food safety, (4) their knowledge of food safety practices (5) their perceptions of genetically modified food, and (6) their intent to purchase genetically modified food.

Key Findings

The key findings of the study include the following:

- The majority of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that fruits and vegetables were safe.
- Respondents identified eggs and milk as the safest animal products, followed by whole cuts of meat (steak, pork chops, chicken), ground products (sausage, ground beef), and seafood.
- Respondents were slightly more worried about the safety of growth hormones in food than bacteria in food.
- 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, while about half of respondents reported concerns with the safety of food additives and preservatives.
- Florida residents were more concerned about the safety of food prepared at a restaurant than in their kitchen.
- Just under half the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that food safety is a major concern, while slightly less respondents agreed or strongly agreed that food safety is a major concern of Americans.
- The most respondents indicated that health professionals were a somewhat trustworthy or very trustworthy source to deliver accurate food safety information.
- About half of respondents indicated they learned about food safety on television, from their parents, and through online sources.
- Most respondents did not understand the science of genetically modified food nor could they identify what foods were genetically modified, but a large portion had read or heard about the technology.
- Respondents were generally unsure about the benefits of genetically modified food and believed that the technology tampered with nature.
- When asked about purchasing intent, respondents indicated they were unsure about purchasing food labeled as "containing genetically modified ingredients" and were more willing to purchase products labeled as "free of containing genetically modified ingredients."
- Respondents were unsure if they would purchase certain genetically modified products. The exceptions were that more people *would not* buy genetically modified seafood and *would* buy clothes containing genetically modified fibers.