

第四届大学生国际学术研讨会研究计划 Sample

Proposal (Sample)

Theme: Sustainability and technology development

Chinese gatekeeper perceptions of genetically modified food

Abstract: The purpose of this study is to investigate perceptions of food distribution gatekeepers (decision makers) in China regarding likely acceptance of genetically modified (GM) foods by Chinese consumers. An in-depth interviews will be adopted. Key informants of a sample of 20 companies in five main commercial centers in mainland China will be interviewed. The study might find that Chinese consumers currently have ambiguous views of GM food products and they are likely to accept GM foods provided there are consumer benefits, a price advantage, and credible governmental information concerning safety of GM foods.

Keywords: China, genetic modification, food products, risk management

Introduction and literature review

A major dilemma for modern societies is to decide on the “right” balance between benefits and risks of new technologies. Every technological advance carries some risk of adverse effects, and it becomes a juggling exercise for policy makers to weigh up the benefits and the risks in order to decide: “How safe is safe enough?” (Slovic, 2000).

Beliefs about risks and benefits of both the production process and of the resulting product contribute to consumer acceptance or rejection of GM foods in developed countries (Van Den Heuvel et al., 2006; De Liver et al., 2005); general attitudes towards the environment, towards science and technology, food neophobia, levels of trust in regulators, and price sensitivity are all thought to influence attitudes towards GM technology (Bredahl et al., 1998).

Worldwide, the consumption of foods derived from GM crops is rising rapidly. On the one hand, scientists, biotechnology companies, and 10.3 million farmers in 22 countries (James, 2007) have collectively concluded that the benefits enormously outweigh the risks. On the other hand, in many countries consumers have not seen any benefits that might accrue to them, and have resisted introduction of GM foods (Gaskell et al., 2004).

Several consumer surveys have been conducted in different regions of China regarding awareness, acceptance and willingness to buy GM foods, with highly discrepant results. At one extreme is a study by Greenpeace which claimed that GM foods were not generally accepted by Chinese consumers (cited in Huang et al., 2006); at the other are studies indicating positive attitudes towards GM foods, although consumers have little knowledge of such foods (Li et al., 2002; Zhong et al., 2002). A recent very extensive study of 1005 households randomly selected in eleven cities in Northern and Eastern China reported that “the percentages of the consumers’ approval of and willingness to buy GM foods in China were high. In general, the acceptance rates were much higher than all other countries that have been reported in the literatures” (Huang et al., 2006). A reservation pertaining to these consumer surveys is the risk that the GM issue was examined as a single cue, which may have given this characteristic undue prominence in respondents’ minds.

Research objective

The objectives of the present research are to determine how GM foods are perceived by gatekeepers in the food distribution channel in China and what they believe consumer attitudes towards GM technology are at present and are likely to be in future. We also set out to relate what food channel members perceived to current Chinese government policy regarding introduction of GM food crops in China. If China, the world’s numerically largest consumer market, seems likely to embrace GM technology in the near future, then the Chinese market is likely to be accepting of food products from other countries that have also adopted the technology.

Methodology to be used

Personal interviews will be conducted with key informants of a sample of twenty companies in five main commercial centers in mainland China. During the interviews, we will deliberately avoid mentioning genetic modification as a topic of interest; we wish to hear what factors are most salient to the respondents, rather than forcing the discussion to focus on the GM issue out of context. The aim is to sample as much diversity as possible among the participants so that an overall view could be distilled from these diverse sources.

Possible findings and implications

The interview from the food distribution decision makers might be that Chinese consumers are likely to accept GM foods provided there are consumer benefits and a price advantage. It may also suggest that Chinese consumers’ current ambiguous views regarding GM foods seem likely to dissipate if the Chinese Government gives a clear endorsement regarding safety of GM foods.

Findings from this research are therefore of considerable practical importance to public policy makers who may be considering whether or not to adopt GM technology. (650)

References

(Omitted)

Adapted from *Chinese gatekeeper perceptions of genetically modified food*
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