

What people know about genetically modified canola

Some people are not aware that canola plants have been genetically modified (GM) and that GM canola seeds are being sold to farmers in the USA and Europe. These canola plants contain a gene that makes the plants tolerant to the weedkiller Roundup®. This allows a farmer to spray the crop with Roundup® to kill the weeds without damage to the canola crop. At present, genetically modified canola seeds are not being sold in Australia.

At the end of this worksheet you will:

- have surveyed a sample of people to find out what they think about genetically modified canola and about eating the oil from these plants;
- know whether canola oil from GM canola plants is considered to be a GM food product.

What you will need:

- access to the internet.

What to do:

1. Work individually or in pairs to work out a set of survey questions. To do this you will need to decide:
 - a) What do you want to know about people's knowledge about GM food and their attitudes to GM food? For example, you might want to find out if people know what a GM crop is; if they are aware that some canola crops have been genetically modified; what they know about genetically modified canola; whether or not they would eat oil from genetically modified canola plants; or whether or not they approve of genetically modified food crops.
 - b) Think of one question for each piece of information you want to find out. For example, 'Can you name a plant that has been genetically modified?'

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- c) Make sure that you include a question to find out if people expect the oil from GM canola to be different from other canola oil.
 - d) Make sure your questions have a yes/no answer or a one-word answer. For example, 'Do you know what the term "genetically modified" means?' 'Would you eat canola oil from GM canola?'
 - e) Make sure that your questions are fairly short so that people will be able to understand them easily.
 - f) Make sure that your questionnaire will not take up too much of a person's time to answer.
2. Print your questionnaire and survey between 10 and 20 people.
 3. Collate (put together) the group or class results.

Discuss the results and decide what it is that most people need to be informed about in relation to GM canola and what the most common attitudes to GM canola are. A summary of this will become a major part of your report.

What to do with your information:

1. Prepare a group report to present to the class. The report should include:
 - a summary of the ideas that you wanted to find out about in your survey;
 - a list of the questions that you asked;
 - a summary of the results; and
 - a concluding statement that sums up what you think the results mean.
2. Show all the sources that you referred to.

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Useful resources

CSIRO - Genetically modified foods and community opinion

<http://genetech.csiro.au/research/index.htm>

CSIRO - How will gene technology affect me?

<http://genetech.csiro.au/affect.htm>

BBC News - Perils of far-flung pollen

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/special_report/1999/02/99/food_under_the_microscope/newsid_289000/289002.stm#top

BBC News - other articles on pollen

<http://news.bbc.co.uk> then search for 'pollen'

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