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Bosnia-Herzegovina

Biotechnology

Consumer Perceptions

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Approved by:

Sarah Hanson
U.S. Embassy

Prepared by:

Sanela Stanojcic

Report Highlights:

Consumers think that they don't have enough information to be pro or against biotech products, and that they need more information in order to decide whether or not they'll consume them. More information could change consumer attitudes towards biotechnology in a positive direction. Additionally, more knowledgeable consumers say they would eat biotech foods after proper testing and labeling.

Includes PSD Changes: No
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Consumer Perceptions of Biotech Products

Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) annually imports around 70% of its food needs, and the general opinion is that imported food is low quality. Most consumers have lost total confidence in local authorities regarding controlling and testing of imported food products. This is due to constant rumors and media articles about importing “garbage from Europe and from the rest of the World that nobody else wants”, or “BiH being unable to test imported foods,” or for example, when “meat intended for disposal was processed into sausages and other products in BiH”. People believe more and more that locally produced foods are the best quality. This could be one of the reasons why people generally dislike biotech products. Other reasons include:

- Biotechnology means interfering with “God’s work” and changing nature,
- We don’t need biotech foods, we can produce enough food in BiH, farmers just need more support,
- Biotech foods are carcinogenic, dangerous in many ways (some consumers are unable to say why),
- Biotechnology could threaten BiH’s organic production; if BiH starts growing it, nobody would buy our food any more in Europe.

Officially, BiH is not producing any biotech products. Unofficially, biotech products are already being imported and grown in the country, since BiH was unable to control its borders for a long time after the war ended, and BiH was also unable to test the biotech presence in foods and seeds.

What Could be done to Change Consumer Attitudes

Advanced consumers think that they don’t have enough information to be pro or against biotech products, and that they need more education in order to decide whether or not they’ll consume them. More information could change consumer attitudes towards biotechnology in a positive direction. Additionally, more knowledgeable consumers say they would eat biotech foods after proper testing and labeling, so they could decide whether they want to buy such a product. The local authorities in charge of food wholesomeness and quality should earn consumers confidence again. Educating scientists is important, and educating the media is even more important since they are affecting and creating public opinion more than anything else (consumers usually believe the media more than the scientists).

Note: USDA soy meal and corn donations initially met stiff government resistance. One high level Ministry of Agriculture official confused BSE (mad cow disease) and biotech by stating in a national television interview, “I’d rather go hungry than become crazy from eating GMO corn!”