

One in two Europeans believe biotechnology will improve quality of life

52% of those polled in the latest Eurobarometer survey on biotechnology, published today, indicated a belief that biotechnology will improve their quality of life. The Eurobarometer "Europeans and biotechnology in 2005" shows that most Europeans are in favour of medical (red) applications of biotechnology when there are clear benefits for human health; and industrial (white) applications, but they are still mostly sceptical about agricultural (green) biotech, and will continue to be so unless new crops and products are seen to have consumer benefits. Confidence has increased in the European Union's regulation of biotechnology but there is no evidence that this has influenced the public's reported purchasing intentions, especially for GM foods. Overall, optimism about biotechnology's contribution to improving society has grown significantly since 1999. There is also support for research using stem cells, provided this is tightly regulated. This survey is the latest in a series of regular surveys on attitudes to biotechnology undertaken since 1991. The survey will be presented at a workshop on 22 June 2006 in Brussels.

The survey examines issues such as:

- **Optimism about the contribution of technology**, including biotechnology, to our way of life. Here, the survey shows that optimism about biotechnology has increased since 1999, after a period of decline (52% say it will improve their life)
- The **development of nanotechnology, pharmacogenetics** (analysing a person's genetic code in order to create drugs which are tailored to him/her and are therefore more effective) and **gene therapy**, all three of which are generally perceived as useful to society and morally acceptable.
- **GM food**, where a majority of Europeans (58%) think it should not be encouraged,
- Industrial (white) technologies, such as **bio-fuels, bio-plastics** (plastics manufactured from crop plants) **and biopharming** (the use of genetically modified plants in the production of medicines and pharmaceutical products) for pharmaceuticals, which are widely supported.
- **Stem cell research**, where there is considerable support across Europe, if tightly regulated. There is approval for use of both stem cells derived from umbilical cords (65%) and embryonic stem cells (59%), with 26% of people saying they do not approve of embryonic stem cell research at all or only under very special circumstances.
- **Use of personal genetic data**, with 58% of participants indicating they would allow their genetic data to be banked for research purposes, though there are differing levels of support for genetic data banks across the EU.

- **Trust in actors involved in biotechnology**, which shows growing levels of trust in university and industry scientists (73% and 64%). The EU is seen as more trustworthy than national governments on issues of regulating biotechnology (74% compared with 68%).
- **Comparison of attitudes with US and Canada**, dispelling claims that European public opinion is more technology-adverse than its transatlantic partners.

Close analysis of the data shows that it is inaccurate to ascribe certain attitudes to biotechnology by age group, or gender.

This survey is the latest in a series of such Eurobarometers on biotechnology conducted in 1991, 1993, 1996, 1999, 2002 and 2005. The sixth Eurobarometer on Biotechnology 2005 is based on a representative sample of 25 000 respondents, approximately 1 000 in each EU Member State.

The experts who undertook this survey will present the findings at a workshop on 22 June. To register for the workshop, download the full report and read the executive summary, please visit:

www.ec.europa.eu/research/press/2006/pr1906en.cfm