

Biotech Focus Groups – Wave I
Draft Moderator’s Guide

I. Introduction and Ground Rules

Thanks for joining us today. I’m _____, and this is my colleague _____. We’re from Westat, a private research company based in Rockville, MD. On behalf of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (often called FDA), Westat is conducting discussions with individuals like yourselves around the country. The focus of our discussion today is on biotechnology-derived foods or genetically engineered foods, sometimes also called “GMO” foods or bioengineered “BE” foods. Your insights are very important to us, and your time today is appreciated. We will have about 90 minutes for our discussion.

Before we get started there are a few things I need to mention. I know when you all came into the facility they had you read and sign an informed consent form, but I would like to review the key elements in that form.

- First, your participation is voluntary. You don’t have to answer any of our questions that make you uncomfortable, and you can leave at any point in the discussion. There’s no penalty to you for doing so.
- Having said that, we do not think there are any risks to you for participating in today’s discussion. We’re going to ask for your views and opinions about genetically engineered foods. There are no particular benefits to your participation, either, although you will be contributing to FDA’s understanding of what American consumers know and think about genetically engineered products. You will receive a token of appreciation of [\$75] at the end of the discussion as a “thank you” for taking the time to join us today.
- Next, your identity will be kept private to the extent provided by law, which means that we will never use your name in anything we write about the project. When preparing our report for FDA, we might use a quote from someone in the group, but we would only say, “A participant in [CITY] said.”
- We are also audio- and video-recording today’s discussion. This is so when we get back to our office in Rockville we have an accurate record of what was said when we do our analysis. The files are stored on secure servers at Westat and FDA, are only available to members of the project team, and these files will be destroyed once the project is completed.
- We also have some observers today from the project team at the Food and Drug Administration, the Department of Agriculture, and Environmental Protection Agency: [NOTE ANY OBSERVERS BEHIND the GLASS]; we are also livestreaming today’s discussion so that FDA, USDA, and EPA staff who could not be here in [CITY] can log in and view the discussion. All staff who are observing have had to complete our human subjects training and must maintain your privacy.

Do you have any questions? [ANSWER ALL QUESTIONS]

Great! Let me tell you just a couple of rules to make sure our discussion flows smoothly today. Please speak one at a time. This will ensure that I can hear everybody and that everyone’s perspective can be included in our study. Also, there are no right or wrong answers to any of the questions I ask. Feel free to express an opinion that’s different from others in the room – we want to hear the full range of views on this topic. Finally, if you need to step out for any reason, please feel free to do so. The restrooms are [DESCRIBE LOCATION]. But I would ask that not everyone decide to go at the same time!

Any questions? [ANSWER ALL QUESTIONS]

Let's get started!

II. Warm-up

Let's go around the room and please tell us just your first name and then some interesting fact about yourself – maybe an interesting hobby, someone famous that you met, some great place to which you've traveled. [MODERATOR GO FIRST; MAKE SURE YOUR NOTE-TAKER/CO-MODERATOR DOES NOT GET LEFT OUT OF THIS EXERCISE.]

III. Habits and Knowledge

As I mentioned when we started, tonight, we are going to talk about biotechnology and biotechnology-derived foods, sometimes also called GMOs, bioengineered "BE" foods or genetically engineered foods. To ease the discussion, I will use the term "genetically engineered" but you may use a term that you are most familiar and comfortable with.

1. What foods, if any, that you buy are genetically engineered?
2. Do you seek out genetically engineered foods, do you try to avoid them, or do you not worry about genetically engineered foods when you purchase food?
3. How do you know if a food item was genetically engineered or not?
4. What crops or food products do you think are commonly genetically engineered? [MODERATOR: Right answers include corn, soy, and sugar beets.]
5. What relationship, if any, do you think there is between organic foods and genetically engineered foods? [MODERATOR: Right answer is that anything carrying the label organic is non-GMO.]
6. For any of you who are trying to avoid genetically engineered foods, what do you look for when you are shopping? [PROBES: organic label; explicit "non GMO" label]
7. What does it mean to you that a food was genetically engineered?
8. What, if anything, is different about genetically engineered foods compared to conventional foods? What about the way it is grown? The type of farm it is grown on? Any other differences?
9. What do you think about feeding animals genetically engineered feed? [Probe: does genetically engineered feed make these animals genetically engineered, why/why not?]

IV. Information Needs/Sources

1. Where do you find information about genetically engineered foods? [PROBES: Internet – which sources? Word of mouth? TV – which sources?]
2. If you were interested in learning more about how foods are genetically engineered, what information sources would you seek out? [Moderator: please write down responses on a flip chart.]
3. Which of these do you believe to be the *most trustworthy* source of information about genetically engineered foods? Why?
4. Which would you say is the *least trustworthy* source of information about genetically engineered foods? Why?

5. What else would you like to know about genetically engineered foods? What type of information would be most useful in answering any questions you have about genetically engineered foods?

V. Attitudes and Beliefs/ Perceived Benefits and Risks

1. If you were to say just one thing about genetically engineered foods to someone who does not know anything about them, what would you say? [MODERATOR: this question is to elicit participants' feelings and beliefs about biotech. Encourage introspection.]
2. Why, do you think, foods are genetically engineered? Please give me all reasons that come to your mind. [MODERATOR: LIST ON FLIP CHART] [Probe: to feed growing world population, to use fewer herbicides/pesticides, to make plants herbicide resistant.]
 - o Let's look at this list and I'd like you to tell me which reasons you think are benefits, and which are risks. [MODERATOR: Create two columns (Risk, Benefit); get a show of hands for each column for each item on the list.]
3. Does anything worry or concern you about genetically engineered foods? If yes, what, concerns/worries you most about genetic engineering of food? [PROBES: health issues (what kind, e.g., allergy?), integrity of species, unknown consequences (what kind?); nutritional value (explain), farming system (explain), environmental impact, religious concerns (explain).] What type of information would you seek out if you had this concern?
4. Do you think there are benefits of genetically engineered foods? If yes, what are they?

VI. Creative Exercise - Sentence Completion

[Please pass out sentences with blanks and ask participants to fill them out. When they are finished ask them what words they have put in.]

1. Genetically engineered foods offer _____, _____, and _____.
2. If genetically engineered foods become more common in the future, it will _____.

VII. Reactions to Concepts

[We will show participants three informational concepts and ask a set of questions after each concept. The order of showing these concepts will be rotated in consecutive groups.]

[Concept mock-ups are provided in Appendix V.]

Concept #1 "The Regulatory Process"

"The Federal government - EPA, FDA, and USDA - ensures that genetically modified crops are safe and that people, food, the environment, and animals are protected."

[This concept outlines, at a high level, the role of Federal government in regulating agricultural biotechnology in food and animal feed.]

1. In your own words, what is this concept trying to tell you?
2. Who is it addressing?

3. What do you like about this piece?
4. What you do not like about this piece?
5. What is not understandable or requires more clarification?
6. What else would you like to see here?
7. Overall, how likely is this concept to encourage you to learn more about genetically engineered foods?

Questions specific to this concept:

8. What do you think about the term genetically modified? [Probe for: is it positive/negative, self-defining, approachable?] What does it mean to you in relation to YOUR food?
9. The headline includes the words “safe” and “protected”. To what extent the information provided assures you that this process is safe and that people, food, the environment, and animals are protected?
10. How does mentioning the government regulatory agencies (FDA, USDA, EPA) in the concept make you feel? Are you interested to find out more about what each agency does?

Concept #2 “Views”

“What are some of the views in the GMO discussion?”

[This concept describes different viewpoints on agricultural biotechnology. It includes messaging that shows two different viewpoints (point/counterpoint) on the same issue followed by fact/science.]

1. In your own words, what is this concept trying to tell you?
2. Who is it addressing?
3. What do you like about this piece?
4. What you do not like about this piece?
5. What is not understandable or requires more clarification?
6. What else would you like to see here?
7. Overall, how likely is this concept to encourage you to learn more about genetically engineered foods?

Questions specific to this concept:

8. What do you think about the term bioengineered (BE)? [Probe for: is it positive/negative, self-defining, approachable?] What does it mean to you in relation to YOUR food?
9. How balanced is this concept in presenting different views? What do you think about scientific column? [Probe for: does scientific column seem unbiased?]
10. This concept does not mention any government entity, or any organization. What kind of organization would you expect to be putting this concept out?

Concept #3 “Different Voices”

“Agricultural Biotechnology. It means something different to everyone.”

[This concept defines agricultural biotechnology through different voices, e.g., a mom, farmer, an academic scientist and a Government official). It shares the variety of perspectives on the issue through a storytelling process. This concept uses a conversational tone to share some facts/data but mostly focuses on values and their impact on decision-making related to agricultural biotechnology process and products.]

1. In your own words, what is this concept trying to tell you?

2. Who is it addressing?
3. What do you like about this piece?
4. What you do not like about this piece?
5. What is not understandable or requires more clarification?
6. What else would you like to see here?
7. Overall, how likely is this concept to encourage you to learn more about genetically engineered foods?

Questions specific to this concept:

7. What do you think about the term agricultural biotechnology? [Probe for: is it positive/negative, self-defining, approachable?] What does it mean to you in relation to your food?
8. Which person in this concept seems most relevant to you? Which one seems least relevant?
9. This concept does not mention any government entity, or any organization. What kind of organization would you expect to be putting this concept out?

[After showing all concepts, ask]

10. Which one of these concepts seemed most useful to you? Why?
11. Which one was the least useful? Why?
12. Do you have anything else to add that we have not touched upon today?

VIII. False Close

[Ask questions from observers.]

Thank you and good bye.