

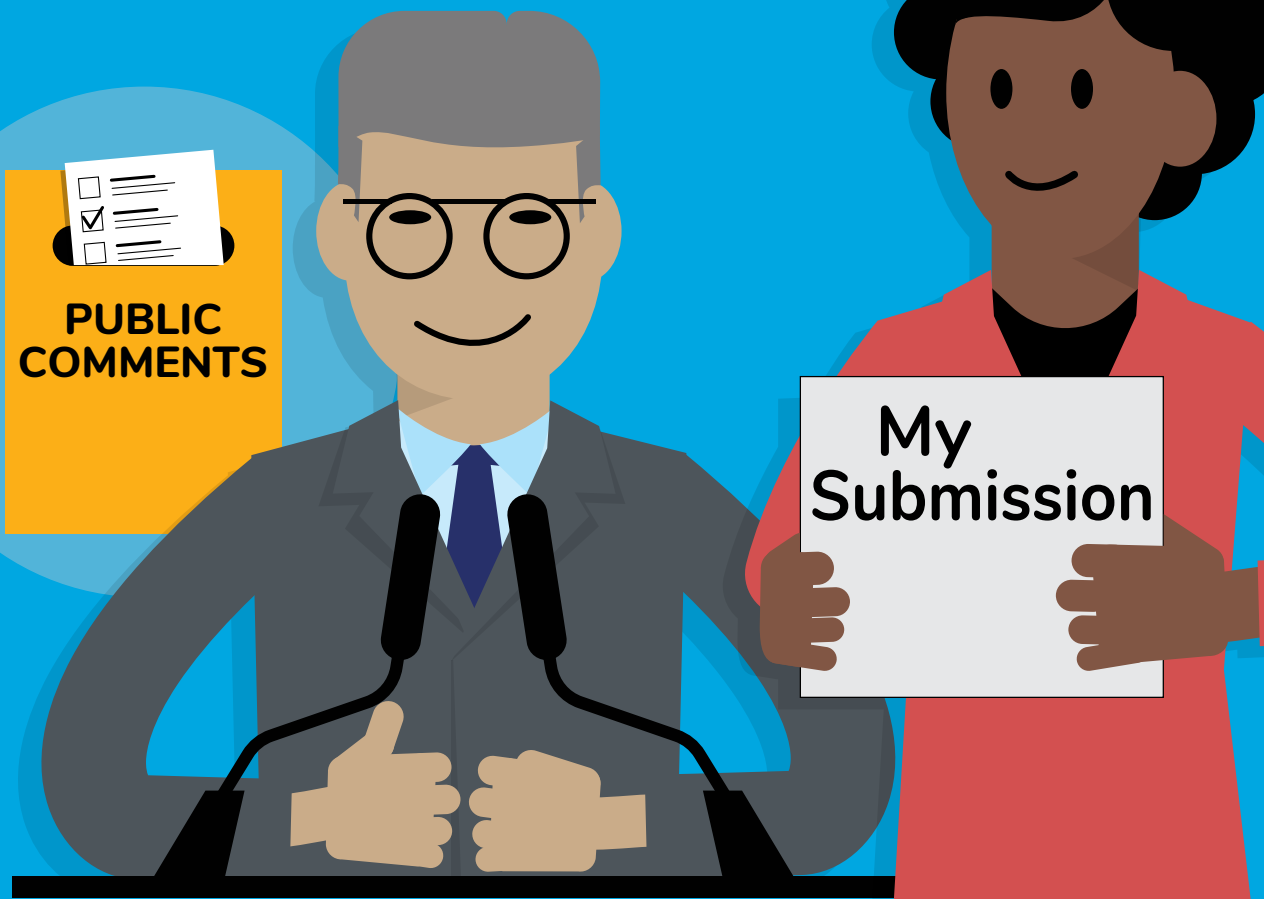


**Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations**

Information toolkit on
food biotechnologies
with a focus on
food safety

10

Public engagement



This “Information toolkit on food biotechnologies with a focus on food safety” is a publication consisting of one handbook and ten booklets, referred to as tools. It is strongly recommended to read through the whole set before using the information it contains.

Contents of the information toolkit on food biotechnologies with a focus on food safety

Handbook - Using the information toolkit

Tool 1: Background and guidance

Tool 2: Fundamentals

Tool 3: Rationale for potential benefits

Tool 4: GM food safety assessment

Tool 5: Regulations

Tool 6: Human health

Tool 7: The environment

Tool 8: Practical uses and applications

Tool 9: Current innovations

Tool 10: Public engagement

Introduction



Tool 10 provides considerations and examples that could help the users of this toolkit to engage with people during the authorization process of genetically modified (GM) foods and when establishing and modifying the national legislation for food biotechnologies in general. Contact details for the national authority (or authorities) can be provided as appropriate. During the stock-taking analysis, it was found that there were few communication materials covering public engagement compared to other aspects of food biotechnologies (FAO, 2020). This tool can help users to engage the public in national activities around food biotechnologies for the purpose of increasing transparency and confidence in governmental decision making. It is suggested that users provide country specific information when developing their own materials. The following are the key messages:

1. You can have a say in the approval process of GM foods.
2. Public comments about national regulations on food biotechnologies are welcome.

The two examples can be used as starting points to develop materials that invite for public engagement, where applicable. These materials could be showcased on government websites or other relevant platforms. The images alongside the text below can be referred to as quasi-illustrations of how one may present the materials.

Two examples

You can have a say in the approval process of GM foods

This example may help to show that it is possible to engage the public during the approval process of GM foods. A due date of the written submission, a short explanation of the assessment and a place to submit comments can be added by users to develop their own materials. Ways to engage the general public may differ from country to country, and each government is expected to use its own approach. It is noted that there are countries where the authorization process is solely based on scientific risk assessments or sometimes in combination with socio-economic considerations. The authorization might not include taking into consideration public comments. In such a case, the example text can be modified in a way to fit the national context. The point is that the general public can comment or ask questions on the approval process of GM foods. This message can be used each time a new GM food safety assessment is being conducted in order to solicit public comments.

You can have a say in the approval process of GM foods.

Your government invites public comments or questions on results of the GM food safety assessment which are reflected in final regulatory decisions.

I have a question

My Submission



Public comments about national regulations on food biotechnologies are welcome

This example can be referred to when engaging the public in discussions about the national regulations on food biotechnologies in general. Most countries consult the public when they establish or change their regulatory frameworks. Consultation processes on national regulations on food biotechnology enable comments from the general public. In this way, comments from the public are reflected in the decision making. Each government must follow its own rules for public engagement and provide the appropriate contact details.

Public comments about national regulations on food biotechnologies are welcome.

Your comments, concerns and suggestions help inform your government's decision-making.



Reference

FAO. 2020. Stock-taking report: food biotechnology communication materials in the world – Background paper for the 2020 technical consultation meetings on developing a communication toolkit about food biotechnologies. Rome, FAO (also available at <http://www.fao.org/3/cb1394en/cb1394en.pdf>).

Terminology

Biosafety	Set of measures or actions addressing the safety aspects related to the application of biotechnologies and to the release into the environment of transgenic plants and other organisms, particularly microorganisms, that could negatively affect plant genetic resources, plant, animal or human health, or the environment (FAO, 2001).
Biotechnology	Any technological application that uses biological systems, living organisms, or derivatives thereof, to make or modify products or processes for a specific use. In this document, the words “food biotechnology” are used when biotechnology is applied to make or modify foods for human consumption (FAO, 2001).
Conventional counterpart	A related organism/variety, its components and/or products for which there is experience of establishing safety based on common use as food (FAO and WHO, 2009).
Deoxyribonucleic acid	Deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) is a long chain polymer of deoxyribonucleotides. DNA constitutes the genetic material of most known organisms and organelles, and is usually in the form of a double helix, although some viral genomes consist of a single strand of DNA, and others of a single- or a double-stranded ribonucleic acid (RNA) (FAO, 2001).
Gene	The unit of heredity transmitted from generation to generation during sexual or asexual reproduction. More generally, the term is used in relation to the transmission and inheritance of particular identifiable traits. The simplest gene consists of a segment of nucleic acid that encodes an individual protein or RNA (FAO, 2001).
Genome editing	Techniques utilized by scientists to correct or to introduce specific mutations at a particular site (locus) within the DNA of an organism. The techniques used to accomplish these site-specific corrections or directed mutations (base substitution, addition or deletion) include living modified organism (LMO) genome editing and transcription activator-like effector nucleases (TALEN). The term genome editing may be used interchangeably (FAO, 2019).
Genetic modification	Altering the genetic material of cells or organisms with the intention of making them capable of producing new substances or performing new functions (FAO, 2020a). The term genetic engineering may be used interchangeably.
Genetically modified food	Food produced for human consumption and derived from organisms whose genetic material (DNA) has been modified in a way that does not occur naturally, e.g. through introducing a gene from a different organism (FAO, 2020a).
Genetically modified organism	An organism that has been transformed by inserting one or more transgenes (FAO, 2001).
Living modified organism	A living organism that possesses a novel combination of genetic material obtained through the use of modern biotechnology. It is a synonym of GMO, but is restricted to organisms that can endanger biological diversity (FAO, 2001).
Modern biotechnology	Application of: i) <i>In vitro</i> nucleic acid techniques, including r-DNA and direct injection of nucleic acid into cells or organelles, or ii) fusion of cells beyond the taxonomic family that overcome natural physiological reproductive or recombinant barriers and that are not techniques used in traditional breeding and selection (FAO, 2001).

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CE2293EN



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