

# STATEMENT ABOUT EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT VOTE ON NEW GENOMIC TECHNIQUES REGULATION IN PLANTS

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## EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT VOTE

The EU Parliament adopted on February 7th its position on the European Commission proposal for the regulation on New Genomic Techniques, NGTs (which includes gene editing)(1). The approved text establishes that plants containing a limited number of modifications (which will be called NGT-1 Plants) will be considered as equivalent to conventionally-bred plants and will not be subjected to the requirements of the GMO regulation.

Gene edited plants that do not contain foreign DNA (i.e. transgenes), are considered as conventional plants and are not regulated in many Countries including, for example, the United States, Brazil, Argentina, Canada, India and Japan (2), where some products obtained from these plants have already reached the market (see for example 3, 4). At present, all NGT plants are considered as GMOs in the EU and are subjected to a regulation that is no longer fit-for purpose, requires a disproportionate risk-assessment analysis, and strongly limits the possible use of gene editing for breeding new plant varieties. Because of this, and as a result of a mandate by the EU Council, the European Commission drafted a proposal for a new regulation of NGT plants that was published on July 5th 2023, and that has been discussed by the EU Parliament and the Council since that date. The favorable vote of the EU Parliament is only the first step of a process that can be quite long. The approved proposal must now be discussed by the EU Member States through the European Council that can approve, reject or amend it. In the latter case the proposal will have to go to the EU Parliament for second reading and if there is no agreement a so-called “trialogue” between the EU Parliament, the Council and the EU Commission should negotiate a final text.

Even if the approved text contains provisions that are not scientifically sound (e.g. considering NGT-1 plants as equivalent to conventionally-bred plants but prohibiting their use in organic farming) or that it is not clear how they will be implemented (e.g. full ban on patents for all NGT plants) the proposed text is an important step forward towards a regulation more in line with that of most countries exporting agricultural goods.

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There is no doubt on the potential of gene editing for breeding new plant varieties better adapted to agricultural and consumer needs (see for example 5). This is particularly true for Europe that is suffering already the effects of climate change in agriculture and that aims at improving agriculture sustainability in the future. It is therefore essential for the EU that this legislative process results in a regulation allowing EU consumers and farmers to benefit from new technologies while ensuring its responsible use and the safety of the obtained products.

### References:

1. <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20240202IPR17320/new-genomictechniques-meps-back-rules-to-support-green-transition-of-farmers>
2. Buchholzer, M. and Frommer, W.B. (2023), An increasing number of countries regulate genome editing in crops. *New Phytol*, 237: 12-15. <https://doi.org/10.1111/nph.18333>
3. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/jennysplitter/2019/03/05/trans-fat-free-gene-edited-soybean-oil/>
4. Waltz E. GABA-enriched tomato is first CRISPR-edited food to enter market. *Nat Biotechnol*. 2022 Jan;40(1):9-11. doi: 10.1038/d41587-021-00026-2. PMID: 34907351.
5. Zhang, Y., Massel, K., Godwin, I.D. et al. Applications and potential of genome editing in crop improvement. *Genome Biol* 19, 210 (2018). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13059-018-1586-y>