

Will gene editing and other new GM techniques sidestep controversy over ‘foreign’ genes?

Scotts Miracle-Gro Company is developing genetically modified grass that would need less mowing, be a deeper green and be resistant to damage from the popular weedkiller Roundup. But the grass will not need federal approval before it can be field-tested and marketed.

Scotts and several other companies are developing [genetically modified crops](#) using techniques that either are outside the jurisdiction of the Agriculture Department or use new methods — like “genome editing” — that were not envisioned when the regulations were created.

Companies can get around oversight by avoiding components from plant pests. In Scotts’s newer grasses, for instance, the foreign genetic material comes only from other plants and is inserted with a gene gun rather than by bacterium.

Other companies are using genome-editing techniques that can change the plant’s existing DNA rather than insert foreign genes. Cibus, a privately held San Diego company, is beginning to sell herbicide-resistant canola developed this way.

The trend alarms critics of biotech crops, who say genetic modification can have unintended effects, regardless of the process.

“They are using a technical loophole so that what are clearly [genetically engineered crops](#) and organisms are escaping regulation,” said Michael Hansen, a senior scientist at Consumers Union. He said the grass “can have all sorts of ecological impact and no one is required to look at it.”

Read full, original article: [By ‘Editing’ Plant Genes, Companies Avoid Regulation](#)