

Europe debating how to regulate emerging genome editing technology

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EU policymakers are about to embark on a process which will go a long way to shaping the future of plant breeding in Europe – and whether EU farmers will be able to benefit from an emerging new technology.

After years of contemplation, the European Commission is expected to publish soon, possibly by the end of October, its opinion on how the relatively new technology, genome editing, should be classified and regulated.

This will kick-start a process which will eventually determine whether crops created by the technology, or at least strands of it, should be classified as genetically modified organisms (GMOs).

Genome editing involves inserting pieces of DNA, known as ‘molecular scissors’ into a host plant to cut and alter the genome of the host plant. In its simplest form, the technology deletes or alters existing genes without introducing new DNA.

Prof Huw Jones, of Rothamsted Research, Hertfordshire, said genome editing had the potential to revolutionise plant breeding in Europe, but only if policymakers treat it fairly.

He said: “If it is seen as a non-GMO, it will streamline the approval process and could change how plant breeding is done.

“If it is seen as a GMO...All the subsequent negativity surrounding GM would effectively prevent them being used in Europe.”

Penny Maplestone, chief executive of the British Society of Plant Breeders, said: “How the technology develops from here is completely dependent on what happens in the regulatory world.

The environmental lobby sees things differently. Various non-Governmental organisations have already joined forces to oppose the new technology and demand it is regulated as GM.

Read full, original post: [GM or not GM? Why key decisions on new technology will shape EU plant breeding](#)