CRISPR-edited plants aren’t GMOs—and 4 other essential facts about gene editing

If you’ve been stunned by all the alarming reports of gene-edited babies, you might have the impression that the only purpose of CRISPR, the genetic technology that enables biologists to edit DNA, is meddling with the human genome.

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Over the last year of covering CRISPR applications, I’ve come to recognize that a better reflection of the gene-editing technology’s promise is visible in the labs of scientists creating new varieties of plants.

1. **CRISPR AND CROPS**

Given all the controversy associated with genetically modified crops, you might be wondering whether CRISPR is any different. Plant geneticist Yi Li from the University of Connecticut argued that CRISPR’s precision makes it different from GMOs because no foreign genes from other species are added to the plant. Li used CRISPR to engineer citrus trees that are resistant to the greening disease Huanglongbing, which has devastated citrus crops in Florida and other parts of the world.

2. **CRISPR AND ORGANIC FARMING**

Plant pathologist Rebecca Mackelprang of the University of California, Berkeley suggests that some forms of CRISPR editing mimic naturally occurring genetic mutations that arise spontaneously in nature, which means this biotechnology can actually help meet the goals of organic farming. Furthermore she explains how CRISPR is a way for academic researchers to enter the world dominated by Big Ag.

Read full, original article: CRISPR isn’t just for editing human embryos, it also works for plants and bugs: 5 essential reads