

Viewpoint: It's time Europe updates its 18-year-old GMO rules to regulate CRISPR-edited crops

Ernst van den Ende, Wageningen University
Ernst van den Ende. Image:
Wageningen University

'In lectures, I often try to clarify things by using the tomato as an example,' says Ernst van den Ende, director of the Plant Sciences Group at Wageningen University & Research. 'That species has one billion DNA letters. If you compare the DNA of a commercial tomato with its wild forebear, then you see that an average of about 20 million DNA letters are different. Those differences arose in the past through classic plant breeding and mutation breeding, which are not subject to controls.

Now we are talking about changing one or two letters in the DNA with CRISPR-Cas and this is supposed to need legal controls.' The ruling by Europe's highest court, which deemed CRISPR-Cas to be genetic modification, dates from July 2018.

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European seed companies will have to compile a large dossier if they want to apply this technology in their plant breeding programmes. Market approval for crops that are officially genetically modified costs years and tens of millions of euros in safety tests, field trials and risk assessment. That is a major barrier to breeding crops with new properties, says Van den Ende.

Read full, original article: [Ernst van den Ende on CRISPR-Cas: 'The GMO directive needs to be amended'](#)