International group of economists, geneticists calls for relaxed crop gene-editing rules to promote food security

With renewed attention to implementation and regulation, new plant breeding technologies such as gene editing could make an important contribution to global food security, say a group of plant geneticists and economists.

The authors, from several institutions including the University of Liege, Belgium, and the National Institute for Biotechnology and Genetic Engineering, Pakistan, catalog several new technologies to edit genes of plant crops that they suggest “may allay fears associated with GM crops.”

Because direct gene editing doesn’t involve transferring DNA across species – which creates transgenic crops – the paper, published in the journal *Science*, suggests the new methods could reduce regulatory costs and accelerate innovation.

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[T]he *Science* paper essentially adds to existing calls for less restrictive regulations for biotechnology, advocating also for public-private partnerships and other strategies to help make plant genetic material available to developing countries.

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Although plant biotechnology scientists argue the methods are different to transgenic modifications, the European Union has determined that the new plant gene editing techniques must undergo the same regulatory processes as other genetically modified organisms. The decision is “devastating” to smaller companies and a deterrent to big funders of the research….

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