

Biotech experts, farmers call for updated US gene-edited crop, animal rules at Senate Agriculture Committee hearing

In opening comments during a Senate Agriculture Committee hearing on [March 12], ranking member Sen. Debbie Stabenow (D., Mich.) said she is concerned that the U.S. Department of Agriculture's proposed biotechnology rule, published last June, does not provide adequate oversight of the biotech sector.

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"The hands-off approach proposed by USDA lacks the strong scientific justification that consumers and our trading partners expect," Stabenow said. A broad coalition of biotech industry leaders, agribusinesses and consumer advocates agree on this.

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Another major point of concern is the difference in handling of gene editing between USDA and the Food & Drug Administration.

[Greggory Jaffe, biotechnology project director at the Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI)], said CSPI supports FDA oversight of animals with intentionally altered DNA adding, "FDA should establish a proportionate, risk-based regulatory system with different levels of oversight based on a product's potential risk."

Iowa Pork Producers president Dr. Michael Paustian said the pork industry supports moving oversight of gene-edited livestock on U.S. farms from FDA to USDA.

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"The USDA has the authority and expertise available to effectively regulate gene-edited livestock, leaving the FDA to focus its attention and resources on other exciting biomedical applications under development," Paustian testified.

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