

## Viewpoint: EU opposition to CRISPR crops threatens sustainable farming in developing world

Agricultural economist Dr. Martin Qaim of the University of Göttingen in Germany recommends that regulatory reforms and a more science-based public debate towards new plant breeding technologies are necessary to maximize the potential of this new science that can greatly contribute to sustainable agricultural development and food security, especially in developing countries.

Through [New plant breeding technologies] NPBT, a plant's desirable traits can be selected and enhanced to develop crops that are biofortified and high-yielding, and yet will require less fertilizer and pesticides as these plants are resistant to pest, diseases, and abiotic stress factors.

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[NPBTs] have remained controversial especially in Europe. Qaim notes that the problem is that regulatory authorities treat plants developed through gene editing in the same way as genetically modified (GM) plants. He also emphasizes that there is a difference between NBPT-derived plants and GM plants, in which the latter has foreign genes from a different species transferred to it while the former has none since the targeted changes occur naturally in principle.

When these two different technologies are treated the same by regulators, it causes low public acceptance and .... leads to the slow development of the NBPTs which not only affects Europe but other developing countries as well who base their perception of NBPTs on Europe's findings.

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