

Growing GMO crops in national wildlife refuges a boon for the environment, biologists say

The path has been cleared for genetically engineered crops, called GECs, to be used again on national wildlife refuges in the Southeast, including in North Carolina.

National wildlife refuges in the region have been unable to use GECs on their properties since 2013 due to concerns about using genetically modified seeds.

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While not all national wildlife refuges in North Carolina have cooperative farming partnerships, the changes had serious effects on those that do.

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“Our research has shown that GECs’ use reduces the amount of pesticides growers would have to use if they didn’t avail themselves of GECs. Crops on refuges are an important source of forage for migratory waterfowl. Their use has support from the service, growers who have relied on refuge properties to grow some of their crops, some of which are set aside for wildlife,” [said Heath Hagy, a biologist with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.]

J.D. Bricken, retired manager of Pee Dee National Wildlife Refuge in Anson County, said he thought management became more difficult once GECs were not permitted. Farmers often have difficulty finding traditional corn seed, he said. “With the refuge and efficiency, we have to make it practical,” Bricken said. “Farmers won’t plant much longer if they can’t use GMOs.”

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While he dislikes using chemicals on refuge property, Bricken sees it as a necessity, as GECs are no longer an option.

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