

Gene-edited plants and animals: Our secret weapons in the battle to slow climate change?

Nearly 200 nations signed on to the [Paris Agreement](#) in 2016, pledging to reduce their countries' greenhouse gas emissions. By now, it's well known that greenhouse gases emitted through human activity trap heat and warm the Earth's surface. To curb emissions, many countries are shifting to cleaner forms of power, like solar and wind, and providing incentives for electric cars.

But a [new report](#) suggests a somewhat surprising strategy for helping to reduce emissions: editing the genes of plants and animals.

"I think that everybody but a few science-fiction writers have underestimated the extent to which this is going to transform human activity and the relationship between humans and environment," said Val Giddings, PhD, a senior fellow at the Information Technology and Innovation Foundation, the nonprofit public policy think tank that released the report.

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One way gene editing could help the climate is by improving plant biology itself. Specifically, it could enhance photosynthesis — the process plants use to convert energy from sunlight into sugar and oxygen. In this process, plants consume carbon dioxide, the most abundant greenhouse gas. Currently, forests and other land vegetation remove about 30% of manmade carbon dioxide emissions from the atmosphere during photosynthesis.

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Gene editing could be used to boost that efficiency to make plants that can suck up more carbon from the atmosphere.

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