

EU agriculture ministers back pro-organic Farm 2 Fork plan, but support gene editing to boost sustainable food production

The EU should make use of innovative breeding technologies to boost sustainability of food production, agriculture ministers agreed on [October 19], as they gave their stamp of approval to the European Commission's 'Farm to Fork' plan to reduce the use of fertilizers by 30 per cent and turn 25 per cent of agricultural land over to organic farming.

The ministers called for the use of "new innovative ingredients and techniques" to boost sustainable food production, as long as they are shown to be safe for humans, animals and the environment.

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This was with reference to precision breeding using gene editing, which enables genetically modified organisms to be generated without introducing genes from other species. As things stand, the technology cannot be used in the EU, following a 2018 ruling by the European Court of Justice, which finds genome editing is subject to the 2001 EU directive banning genetically modified organisms.

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Agriculture ministers want the commission to complete its study of the status of novel genomic techniques under EU legislation by April 2021.

The commission's view is that precision farming technologies should underpin the transition to eco-friendly food production. Frans Timmermans, the commission's executive vice-president for the European Green Deal said the EU aims to give farmers the tools to adopt precision agriculture and to leverage scientific discoveries to optimize seeds.

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