

‘Green’ politics and consumer uncertainty keep GM crops outlawed in Europe. Will gene editing change the legal landscape?

Agronomy grad student Frederik Vilhelm Larsen, at the University of Copenhagen in Denmark, wants to explore all the science that can potentially help farmers. But, for now, focusing research on GMO technology is largely put aside because it can’t be used by farmers there.

“Like everything else, GMOs can be a powerful tool to help with difficult situations farmers face,” said Vilhelm Larsen, 26, whose family farms 520 acres two hours from Copenhagen. “The negative attention comes from overusage of the same herbicide tech and corresponding emergence of herbicide-resistant weeds, which risks increases in total herbicide usage.”

As a result, additional GMO benefits like crops containing Bt that fight crop pests and diseases aren’t given their due. “Everyone likes a crop that can take care of itself,” he said.

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A significant battle happening now is about whether the new CRISPR technology that can “edit” genes within a plant will be considered a GMO or is in an approvable category of its own. CRISPR is already being used on crops like cherry tomatoes (larger fruit/disease resistance) and mushrooms (resistance to browning).

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“In general, I hope the CRISPR technology or some versions of it could be seen as non-GMO technology and would advance conventional breeding for all of the ag sector,” Vilhelm Larsen said.

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