

Viewpoint: COVID-19 vaccine success should prompt us to rethink our fear of GMO 'Frankenfoods'

[COVID vaccines are] one of the biggest, and certainly the most high-profile, utilizations of genetic technology in the history of science.

Genetic manipulation in medicine is nothing new. Since the 1980s, insulin for diabetics, for example, has been produced using bacteria and plants that have had the human gene for insulin inserted.

But the disparity between the way people view food and medicine has long infuriated scientists. Fiona Fox, the chief executive of the Science Media Center, said: "For years plant scientists have complained that we have a different attitude to 'playing God' when it comes to saving human lives than we do to 'messing with nature' in relation to GM crops."

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In the EU, an attempt to treat gene editing differently from stringent GM regulations was rejected in 2018. But since Brexit the UK is free to write its own rules. The results of Defra's consultation will be published within three months, along with the government's response.

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"Conditions today are very different to those in which the organic industry in the UK battled against the introduction of GM crops 20 years ago," [former anti-GMO activist Alex Smith] wrote.

"In the midst of a pandemic, and with genetic science the hero of the hour, the national mood is different."

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