

CRISPR food in Japan: Consumers more skeptical of gene-edited livestock than crops, survey shows

Because humans tend to feel closer to animals than plants, and commonly express feelings regarding animal welfare but not plant welfare, [a team of researchers] led by Naoko Kato-Nitta, a research scientist at Tokyo's Joint Support Center for Data Science Research and Institute of Statistical Mathematics, wanted to see if such moral or taxonomic distinctions would produce any difference in their attitudes towards use of emerging gene-editing techniques such as CRISPR-Cas9.

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The participants were shown a visual diagram explaining how gene-editing works and then asked how they felt about it. The [survey results](#) showed that they were more likely to be worried about the use of gene-editing techniques on livestock than on plants.

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But in a twist to the study design, the researchers split the participants into two groups. In the first, the explainer diagram included cartoon pictures of pigs, and in the second, the diagram included cartoon pictures of tomatoes.

Japanese study illustration

Credit: BMC CABI Agriculture and Bioscience

The group that had been shown pictures of cartoon pigs were subsequently less likely to raise concerns about gene-editing of livestock than the group that had been shown pictures of cartoon tomatoes. The researchers believe that this may be because the pictures of the pigs "primed" the survey participants to be open to livestock gene-editing.

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