

‘Gene hacking’ fall armyworm moths: Biotech company Oxitec behind Florida Keys gene drive mosquitoes approved for pest-release test run in Brazil

Oxitec, the British biotech firm behind the genetically engineered mosquitoes that [just took flight](#) in the Florida Keys [recently], is now moving on to its next gene-hacked pest.

The company is partnering with pharmaceutical corporation Bayer on a genetically engineered version of the fall armyworm, a notorious crop-eating pest that’s ravaged farms in the US, China, India, Brazil, and multiple African nations in recent years, [the news wire Zenger News reports](#).

Just like Oxitec’s mosquitoes, the idea is to release gene-hacked armyworms into the wild that can’t produce female offspring, ultimately driving down the pest population without spraying harmful chemicals.

Brazil’s regulatory agency CTNBio gave Oxitec and Bayer the approval they needed to launch a field test of the gene-hacked armyworm — technically a caterpillar — on commercial crops, so there may be genetically altered bugs crawling across corn farms in the area soon.

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“Our technology potentially reduces the need for additional pesticides in the long term,” Oxitec head of agricultural programs Neil Morrison said, according to Zenger. “Besides reducing populations of the pest, it also has the potential to slow the resistance development to insecticides and biotechnology enhanced crops.”

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