# Viewpoint: ‘Ireland and EU are falling behind in crop improvement because of outdated policies on gene editing’

The EU is falling behind in crop improvement because of its outdated policies on gene editing, say crop scientists. Japan, Canada, the US and now the UK all allow some gene editing of crops, but the EU remains lumbered by legislation written two decades ago. Gene editing allows the DNA of crops to be tweaked to boost sustainability.

It could generate crops less thirsty for pesticide and fertiliser inputs, as well as prepare crops for a future of increasing heat and drought stresses due to climate change. Also, pests and diseases are on the move, due to climate change, at a time when we are trying to reduce pesticide use.

The potential of gene editing is not a fringe viewpoint. “It is a breakthrough technology with huge potential,” says Dr Ismahane Elouafi, the chief scientist of the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO).

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In April a report for the European Commission acknowledged that the EU’s policy of treating gene-edited crops as GMOs was not fit for purpose, and that gene editing could help with more sustainable crops.

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