

‘Gene edited crops are necessary to sustainably feed the world’ — German agroecology and organic advocate challenges his own community

Urs Niggli, long-time director of the Research Institute for Organic Farming FiBL and now President of the Institute for Agroecology, is certain: Agriculture can feed the whole world sustainably. “If you look at how the world population is growing, we can’t drive an extensification strategy globally,” said Niggli.

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Developments towards new foods are therefore important. It is also extremely important for Niggli that breeding is used. “We need to invest more money in plant breeding,” he clarifies. There are currently “certain fantasies” about natural breeding. “We bred for hundreds of years and the modern varieties have nothing to do with nature,” he criticizes this approach. “You can’t see the leap from modern varieties to modern genetically engineered varieties. Very different from going from the wild variety to the modern variety.”

It is paradoxical not to use the gigantic potential of CRISPR/Cas – the gene scissors – and at the same time to demand that fewer pesticides be used. After all, he notes that the culture of discussion about it has improved. In the past he was excommunicated from the organic scene for such statements.

[Editor’s note: This article has been translated from German and edited for clarity.]

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