

Viewpoint: Regulating the ‘product’ not the ‘process’ — Canada’s revised genetic engineering regulations poised to open the door to crop innovation

It’s been 30 years since Canada’s regulatory system for plant breeding innovation was last reviewed, but since then, genetically modified organisms (GMO) technology has become an important feature. More recently, there have been advancements in gene editing such as with [CRISPR Cas9](#), RNAi and epigenetics. These changes, among others, prompted a Health Canada review of its Guidelines for the Safety Assessment of Novel Foods, which were updated in July.

The underlying driver of this clarification — there are no changes to any rules or regulations governing gene editing — is the need to assess new developments according to “product-based” and not “process-based” research. Doing so will lead to greater development of new varieties and hybrids, not just in row crops like soybeans or corn, but in oats, barley, peas, chickpeas and lentils, as well as fruits and vegetables. The review will provide the flexibility and scope to allow for things seen and as-of-yet unseen by the scientific community.

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“The changes mean that many edited products will not be considered novel and so will not be subject to regulatory approval,” says [professor of botany Loren] Rieseberg. “This will encourage the use of gene editing to manipulate traits that are targeted in conventional breeding programs, like resistance to disease or drought, or increases in yield, and thus would not be viewed as novel.”

[**This is an excerpt. Read the original post here**](#)