

Viewpoint: Growing gene-edited food in Europe still faces long delay despite recent reform recommendations

The European Commission, which is the executive arm of the European Union, recently announced that it intends to loosen rules for gene-edited plants.

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What is interesting is why the European Union, which is generally prone to listening to the arguments of environmental campaigners who vehemently oppose any agricultural innovation (all too often at the doorsteps of the Commission's main offices in Brussels, Belgium), suddenly announces this decision that will be cause for controversial debate. The expectation by the EU is that gene-editing will increase varieties while boosting the resilience of crops to climate change, pests, and diseases and to develop plants that require fewer fertilizers. That is both an accurate assessment, but it was equally accurate years ago when the U.S, Canada or Brazil started using the technology effectively.

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There's good news and bad news. The bad news is that despite the announcement of allowing gene-edited crops, they're far away from actually reaching European supermarkets. Manufacturers and legislators will need to jump through a long line of hoops, and the most realistic scenario for commercialized gene-edited crops in shops is 2030. That said, the good news is that the EU dropping its restrictions on gene-editing means that there are fewer conflicts in global trade policy that might prevent Europe from trading food with the world, including on those on whom it currently levies punitive tariffs, such as the U.S.

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