

Swiss consumers are more resistant to gene-edited crops than Americans. What could change the status quo?

This study investigated what consumers from the United States of America (i.e., a country where gene technology is legal and in use for food production) and Switzerland (i.e., a country where the commercialisation of gene technology for food production has been banned since 2005) thought about three specific applications of NGTs in plant breeding.

Roughly half of the participants expressed positive feelings regarding the three applications in an open response field. This confirmed prior findings that a large share of consumers in both countries are open towards or even excited about NGT applications for food production if they offer relevant benefits (e.g., pest control, health benefits for a specific group of people). However, a quarter of participants also expressed negative feelings, and another quarter expressed torn or neutral feelings towards the applications in the open response field.

Swiss participants more frequently reported negative and less frequently positive feelings regarding the three applications than those from the United States of America. ... The results, overall, suggest that the application of NGTs in food production will remain a controversial topic with strong opposition from a minority of consumers, particularly in countries with bans in place.

...

This study also included a scale measuring views on tampering with nature and a question asking whether participants perceive humans as a part of nature or not. ... [I]n Switzerland, people who perceived more strongly that humans were part of nature also reported higher acceptance of the NGT applications. This relationship was not found in the United States of America.

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[O]rganic consumers are frequently cited as the primary opponents of gene technology in agriculture, despite the potential benefits of NGTs for organic agriculture. Not least because "GMO-free" is anchored in organic regulations (e.g., in Europe Regulation 848/2018, Art. 5), assurances or commitments. This study could not confirm these suspicions, as no relationship between a preference for organic foods and acceptance in both countries was found. ... [N]egative views of organic consumers of NGTs are rooted in the perceived absence of benefits and the misunderstanding that organic farming does not involve human intervention and genetic changes.

## Conclusion

[A] citizen or consumer that holds strong values and personal preferences that oppose the use of NGTs will likely not be convinced by benefits and rather focus on potential risks (backed and not backed by scientific evidence), potential economic downsides, inequalities or moral and ethical values that oppose human intervention in nature. [O]ur findings highlight the importance of a collaboration between the life

sciences and social sciences in balancing technological innovations and public perceptions and acceptance, which have been shown to be impacted by affect, values and context.

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