Viewpoint: Here’s why the European Parliament’s plan for loosening crop biotech editing regulations is two steps forward, three steps backward

Many welcomed the European Parliament’s adoption, with a narrow majority of 307 votes for, 263 against and 41 abstentions, of its position on the “proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council concerning plants obtained by means of certain new genomic techniques and the food and feed derived therefrom, and amending Regulation (EU) 2017/625.”

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Conceptually, NTG-1 products are indistinguishable from what can be obtained by “conventional” selection methods (they are “equivalent”). Category 2 NGTs are everything else and their regulations are essentially unchanged (their products are three-card, like “GMOs”, on European soil, but not necessarily on import).

For products from NTG-1, the proposal provided for a lighter authorization regime consisting essentially of a declaration, followed by verification of the NTG-1 status and entry of this status in a register. The ENVI commission proposed adding labeling to seeds and plants, which does not change much, except for the information of farmers.

But the European Parliament adopted… an amendment… which imposes labeling of products, defined very extensively. Naturally, this is of good value, [when it comes to] nutritional or other advantages for consumers. For agronomic improvements (apart from tolerance to a herbicide, which is necessarily reviled) and technological improvements, this will be holy bread for the very influential and very trendy anti-GMO, anti-capitalist, etc. microcosm. A dream support for anxiety!

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

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