As Switzerland mulls ending ban on crop biotechnology, organic farmers and environmental NGOs intensify campaign against reform

At the end of next year, genetically modified plants could be allowed in Switzerland. An alliance of organic farmers and opponents of genetic engineering want to prevent this – and is now launching an initiative.

When the Swiss population last voted on genetic engineering in agriculture, the Federal President was Samuel Schmid, George W. Bush was in power in the USA, and Joseph Ratzinger had just been elected as the new Pope: it was a long time ago.

There has been a moratorium on genetically modified plants and animals in Switzerland since 2005. The cultivation of such plants is only permitted for research purposes, and genetically modified foods cannot be sold. The moratorium has been extended by Parliament several times, most recently in 2021.

The ban will now expire at the end of 2025. The last time the National Council dealt with this, it commissioned the Federal Council to clarify questions about the coexistence of traditional and genetically modified agriculture.

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Even opponents of genetically modified plants assume that the technology will be used in the foreseeable future. In order to protect agriculture, strict legal rules are needed. They have a majority behind them: every four years, the Federal Statistical Office surveys the population about their assessment of the dangers posed by genetically modified foods. The proportion of respondents who rated the technology as dangerous was recently over 70 percent.

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

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