With the end of the EU parliamentary year less than two months away and gene editing regulatory reform stalled, Belgium proposes reform of EU patent requirements

Belgium is looking to break a deadlock among EU governments over a proposed easing of regulation for GMO crops produced using the latest gene editing techniques, by addressing concerns over the patenting of novel seed varieties by agribusinesses.

Belgian officials have proposed that patented plant strains should be excluded from light-touch regulation for genetically modified crops produced using modern DNA editing technology, as the current holder of the EU Council presidency seeks to clinch agreement on new rules before its term expires at the end of June.

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Under a proposal to reform the GMO Directive, the European Commission has proposed creating a new category of genetically modified plant products whose genome has been modified with a limited number of tweaks using targeted mutagenesis techniques developed since the legislation was adopted over two decades ago. Conventional GMOs were produced by inserting a whole gene from one organism into another.

With signals from the EU Council suggesting an inter-governmental agreement was unlikely before the European elections in June, the European Parliament last month finalised its first reading position on the hotly debated bill, in order to avoid having to restart negotiations from scratch when the new assembly takes office in July. A key sticking point was the question of patentability.

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