

4th May 2021

The European Sustainable Agriculture through Genome Editing (EU-SAGE) network, representing scientists at 134 European Plant Science Centres welcomes the study of the European Commission on new genomic techniques

EU-SAGE:

- Endorses that **New Genomic Techniques (NGTs) such as genome editing have the potential to contribute to the objectives of the EU's Green Deal, 'farm to fork' and biodiversity strategies and the United Nations' sustainable development goals (SDGs)** for a more resilient and sustainable agricultural production.
- Notes that **different regulatory oversight for NGTs in Europe and other continents could lead to trade limitations and disruptions**, and put EU operators at a competitive disadvantage, with further negative consequences.
- Underlines that the **current regulatory system involves implementation and enforcement challenges in the EU**, relating in particular to the detection of NGT products that contain no foreign genetic material.
- Draws attention to the fact that **EFSA has not identified new hazards in NGTs compared to conventional breeding techniques**.
- Agrees that the **current regulatory framework has a negative impact on EU public and private research** and innovation in NGTs, which have been rapidly developing, reaching currently 90 potential NGTs applications in plants in Europe.

Taking all the above findings of the EC study into account, EU-SAGE recognizes that there is no adequacy of **the GMO legislation** with technological and scientific developments in biotechnology and therefore it **is not fit for purpose**. EU-SAGE looks forward to developing new policy instruments to make the legislation more resilient, future-proof and uniformly applied.

EU-SAGE declares providing full support on the next steps **to ensure a comprehensive and balanced debate paving the way for the development of a legal framework** suited to this rapidly evolving field, while taking into account the various issues at stake, from the protection of health and the environment to the opportunities for innovation and sustainability.

Background information:

In November 2019, the European Council requested the European Commission to perform a study regarding the status of novel genomic techniques under Union law¹ and to submit a proposal if appropriate, including an impact assessment.

EU-SAGE² is a network, representing plant researchers at 134 leading European plant science institutes and learned societies that have joined forces to provide information about the science and applications of genome editing because we are convinced that genome editing will make a critical contribution in the coming years to render food systems more resilient to climate change and more sustainable.

EU-SAGE is **one of the targeted stakeholders** that has been invited to contribute to this study. Our contribution can be found here: https://ec.europa.eu/food/sites/food/files/plant/docs/gmo_mod-bio_stake-cons_stake-reply-69.pdf

We are of the opinion that genome-edited crops in which alterations have been introduced that can also occur spontaneously or result from conventional breeding activities, should not be subjected to the provisions of the EU GMO legislation (2001/18/EC)³, because this legislation *de facto* acts as a ban. As the French Minister of Agriculture, Julien Denormandie, recently said: ‘New breeding techniques are not GMOs’. A proportionate, non-discriminatory approach is necessary that fosters innovation and supports advanced plant breeding as part of the transition to an eco-friendly and more sustainable food production system.

The scientific community represented by EU-SAGE urges that in a next step a proposal for a proportionate, non-discriminatory regulatory status of genome-edited crops under Union law will be established. Such new legislation also should lay the foundations for an internationally harmonized approach to the regulation of crops developed through NGTs.

The published European Commission study is the crucial starting/breaking point to develop a science-based ‘fit-for-purpose’ policy proposal to enable the development and market introduction of genome-edited crops in the EU. EU-SAGE is looking forward to engage with relevant stakeholders in shaping the future European framework for sustainable plant-based solutions through genome editing in Europe.

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¹ The Council of the European Union requested the Commission ([Council Decision \(EU\) 2019/1904](#)) to submit, by 30 April 2021, “a study in light of the Court of Justice’s judgment in Case C-528/16 regarding the status of **novel genomic techniques** under Union law” (i.e. Directive 2001/18/EC, Regulation (EC) 1829/2003, Regulation (EC) 1830/2003 and Directive 2009/41/EC).”

² <https://www.eu-sage.eu/>.

³ Directive 2001/18/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 12 March 2001 on the deliberate release into the environment of genetically modified organisms and repealing Council Directive 90/220/EEC. (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1590472034900&uri=CELEX:32001L0018>)