

The European Commission has opened the door to a possible loosening of restrictions for plants resulting from gene-editing technology after it launched a review of EU rules on genetically modified organisms (GMOs).

Prompted by a 2018 ruling from the European Union's top court that techniques to alter an organism's genome should be governed by existing EU rules on GMOs, the EC concluded that its 2001 legislation was "not fit for purpose" [Reuters](#) reported.

The 2018 ruling from the Court of Justice of the European Union decided that crops obtained from techniques that altered the genetic material should be subject to the same rules as GMOs, including checks and content labeling for products.

Gene-editing technology such as CRISPR targets specific genes within an organism to promote certain characteristics or curb others, while genetic modification involves transferring a gene from one kind of organism to another. GMOs are rarely used for cultivation in the EU due to longstanding fears of their environmental effects and some campaign groups say gene-editing brings similar risks, Reuters reported.

But the biotech industry has argued that much of gene-editing simply accelerates processes that occur naturally, and that GMO-style regulation would shackle efforts to develop sustainable crops or advance research into human disease.

A 117-page Commission study found that new genomic techniques (NGTs) had the potential to contribute to sustainable food while acknowledging there were concerns about safety, the environmental impact and the issue of labeling.

The Commission said it will consult national governments and other interested parties, produce an impact assessment and conduct a public consultation.

The EC's announcement drew support from German Agriculture Minister Julia Kloeckner, saying a loosening of the legal framework for gene-editing would represent an "overdue modernization" and could help farmers produce sufficient food sustainably.

Industry group Euroseeds said it called for "urgent action" to implement differentiated rules for gene-editing.

However, ecology group Greenpeace rejected separate treatment for gene-editing, saying "GMOs by another name are still GMOs".