

Growing crops to cope with climate change

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Scientists at a British plant science center say they've found a gene that might help develop crops better able to cope with the changing world climate.

The researchers -- funded by the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council at the John Innes Center in Norwich, England -- identified the gene in barley that controls how the plant responds to seasonal changes.

The scientists found the Ppd-H1 gene in barley controls the timing of the activity of another gene called CO. When the length of the day is long enough, CO activates one of the key genes that triggers flowering. Naturally occurring variation in Ppd-H1 affects the time of day when CO is activated, shifting the time of year the plant flowers.

"Growing crops will become more difficult as the global climate changes," said David Laurie, who led the study. "The varieties of crops grown in the UK are suited to the soil, seasons and traditional cool, wet summers. Later flowering in barley means it has a longer growing period to amass yield."

The research appears in the January issue of BBSRC Business.

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