

Food shortage is not the global crisis, lack of access to food is the issue, say NGOs

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Credit: University of Nottingham

"Genome editing is not the answer to world poverty, because food shortage isn't the problem' says a group of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) surveyed by the University of Nottingham.

This is one of three main findings in a report from the School of Sociology and Social Policy at the University, which looks at NGO's scepticism of [genome editing](#) technology.

Genome editing is a rapidly emerging biotechnology gathering hype as a new tool which can be used to develop solutions to a number of global [food security issues](#), vulnerabilities, and problems.

However, resistance to these technologies is well documented and the debate around agricultural technology has been heated and long-running, with the arguments by Greenpeace and NGOs against the technology,

being frequently dismissed as based on 'emotion' and 'dogma.'

As with earlier debates on GM crops, NGOs have increasingly become the subject of intense criticism from leading scientists who support [genome](#) editing in agriculture. The debates have provoked passion on all sides, but rarely have they led to a mutual understanding from both parties. There is now a danger that genome editing will be mired in a similarly polarised and intractable debate as the wider field of agricultural technology.

In the report "Why are NGOs sceptical of genome editing?" published in *EMBO reports*, experts from the University of Nottingham, University of Exeter, and University of Sheffield examine why NGOs are so sceptical through a one-day focus group and nine interviews involving 14 participants from UK and EU-based NGOs.

The findings suggest that opposition to agricultural biotechnology and genome editing cannot be dismissed as being emotional or dogmatic.

Instead, the results of the study found that the view from NGOs on genome editing is based on three specific scepticisms;

- How the problem is defined as a lack of food rather than a lack of access to food, and the alleged urgency of this crisis;
- The solutions, particularly whether further entrenching intensive agriculture through science and [technology](#) can address socio-economic inequalities
- The motivations for removing genome editing from GM regulations – are those involved driven purely for the greater good? Or are they driven by commercial objectives?

Dr Richard Helliwell from the University of Nottingham, and lead author of the report, says: "Sceptical NGOs give alternative problems

and solutions with different outcomes, as part of a broader political discussion about policy impacts within society.

"Our research clearly shows that opportunities are needed for open and constructive debate to build a mutual understanding of opposing positions if the goal is to truly assess the potential for genome-edited crops to play a role in addressing the problem of global [food](#) vulnerability."

More information: Richard Helliwell et al. Why are NGOs sceptical of genome editing?, *EMBO reports* (2017). [DOI: 10.15252/embr.201744385](#)

Provided by University of Nottingham

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