

# France goes soggy on using CRISPR technique for veggies

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France's highest administrative court decided Friday that plants produced using new gene editing techniques such as CRISPR undergo strict testing as genetically modified organisms in a ruling that could see some varieties pulled from the market.

The Conseil d'Etat said in its ruling that the latest gene editing techniques should fall under the strict regulations in place for testing genetically modified organisms.

It gave the government nine months to identify agricultural [plants](#) produced using these gene editing techniques which had not been through the testing procedures used to ensure genetically modified organisms (GMO) are safe.

"This could in practice result in removing the varieties concerned from the catalogue and suspending cultivation," it added.

At the heart of the case was the use of what are called new breeding techniques.

While the first generation of GMOs introduced foreign genes into plants, the latest techniques modify a plant's own genes in an effort to produce desired traits like resistance to disease or higher yield.

One of the best known such tools is CRISPR/Cas9—pronounced "Crisper"—informally known as molecular "scissors" that allow researchers to edit an organism's own genome.

The technique has been widely taken up in [medical research](#), spurring

the development of new treatments but also controversy after a Chinese doctor claimed he edited the [genes](#) of unborn babies to prevent them contracting HIV.

The technique has also been widely adopted by agricultural biotechnology firms, and the case centred on rendering colza and sunflower plants more tolerant to herbicides.

The case was brought in 2015 by certain farmers and environmental groups who disputed a French rule excluding of the new techniques from GMO testing requirements.

The Conseil d'Etat had solicited the advice of the European Court of Justice on the issue, which for its part had said the new techniques should fall under GMO rules.

While some farmers groups welcomed the decision, others complained it would chill innovation and the development of plants that can withstand climate change and called for an update to EU regulations.

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