

UK permits development of gene-edited crops in climate fight

September 29 2021



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Britain's government plans to allow researchers to use gene-editing techniques to develop crops that can increase yields, reduce the need for pesticides and cut greenhouse gas emissions as the U.K.'s exit from the

European Union allows it to deviate from the bloc's rules.

Gene editing could help scientists to quickly breed crops that are more nutritious or resistant to pests and diseases, the government said in announcing its plan to make it easier for scientists to conduct research in the field.

Scientists draw a distinction between [gene editing](#), which involves the manipulation of genes within a single species, and [genetic modification](#), which moves DNA from one species into a different one. Under EU rules, however, they are regulated the same way.

"Gene editing has the ability to harness the genetic resources that nature has provided," Environment Secretary George Eustice said in a statement. "It is a tool that could help us in order to tackle some of the biggest challenges that we face—around [food security](#), [climate change](#) and biodiversity loss."

Academics praised the decision as a first step.

"Genome editing is the most exciting technology that I have seen in my many years working in crop science," said Wendy Harwood, head of the crop transformation group at the John Innes Centre, a 110-year-old institution that researches plant science and genetics. "The technology makes it possible to introduce small changes in crop DNA that lead to the characteristics we need such as disease resistance, better nutritional quality or more resilience to climate extremes."

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Citation: UK permits development of gene-edited crops in climate fight (2021, September 29) retrieved 10 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2021-09-uk-gene-edited-crops-climate.html>

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