

Scotland, Wales Won't Follow UK Westminster Government on Gene Editing Deregulation

Both will follow the EU instead

By [GMWatch](#)

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Although Boris Johnson has [pledged](#) to “liberate” the UK from “anti-GM rules” by ditching the European Union’s precautionary stance, it’s important to understand that the deregulatory moves his government has just announced on gene-edited crops apply to England, and England alone.

That’s because, as the BBC reports below, “the issue is devolved and governments in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland can make their own decision”, and to date every part of the UK with a devolved administration has opposed any growing of GM crops on their territory.

And in response to the Westminster government’s new policy announcement, Scotland and Wales have made it crystal clear that they have absolutely no intention of following England’s unilateral move to deregulate the gene editing of crop plants. Given Northern Ireland has effectively remained within the EU’s single market for goods, it’s almost impossible to see how it could follow England’s unilateral move either.

It’s also worth noting that a majority of people in Scotland and Northern Ireland voted against Brexit and the devolved administrations in both Scotland and Wales are strongly opposed to Boris Johnson’s Tory Party. And, of course, the public consultation on deregulation showed it was highly unpopular among individuals and businesses UK-wide.

That, of course, isn’t the end of the story, because the deregulation of gene editing is a globally coordinated campaign by lobbyists and so there is pressure on the EU to loosen its regulations on gene editing. The EU Commission has begun a process to review its regulatory framework in that light. But there is a lot of anti-GM sentiment in many parts of the EU, as well as in the European Parliament, so despite all the lobbying, the Commission is likely to have a tough fight on its hands to get any deregulatory moves accepted.

1. Disappointment at Defra’s ‘unilateral’ move on gene editing

By The Newsroom

[The Scotsman, 29 Sept 2021](#)

[excerpt only]

After weeks of build-up and hints of major changes to the UK's regulatory framework on the use of gene editing breeding techniques, Westminster will today reveal that its plans will currently be limited to research and development.

However, the Scottish Government, which has previously stated its reservations on the commercialisation of such technology, expressed disappointment at England's unilateral move on the issue, stating that it would continue to engage with Defra, Wales, and Northern Ireland to ensure that devolved competences were respected in charting the country's future direction.

[...]

Commenting recently on the issue, the Scottish government's environment minister, Mairi McAllan said: "Scotland's policy towards GMOs has not changed, and we have no plans for a similar review.

"As for gene-editing, we are disappointed Defra would choose to move unilaterally on this...the Scottish Government is committed to keeping aligned with the EU, and we are monitoring the EU's position closely."

2. Gene-edited crops: 'No plans' to relax rules in Wales

[BBC News, 30 Sept 2021](#)

[excerpt only]

There are no plans to relax the regulation of gene-edited crops in Wales, the Welsh government has said.

Under UK government plans rules will be eased to allow gene-edited crops to be tested and assessed in England in the same way as other varieties.

But the Welsh government says it will maintain its "precautionary approach towards genetic modification".

It will continue to view products produced by gene editing as genetically modified, it said. The changes are possible because the UK no longer has to follow European Union regulations.

But the issue is devolved and governments in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland can make their own decision.

[...]

European Union regulations require that gene-edited crops are treated the same as genetically-modified crops.

The Welsh government say they have no plans to revise the regulations.

“Unlike the UK government, we will continue to view products produced by gene editing as genetically modified as set out by the European Court of Justice in 2018,” a spokeswoman said.

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