

Proposals on GMO regulation jeopardize safety and remove transparency

Summary:

Proposals from Health Canada and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) to exempt many new genetically engineered foods and seeds (genetically modified organisms or GMOs) from regulation would jeopardize human and environmental safety, and result in a profound loss of transparency for Canadians.

Our Key Recommendations:

The Canadian Biotechnology Action Network (CBAN) objects to the proposed devolution of responsibility for safety assessment of some GMOs from government regulators to product developers.

- » Health Canada and the CFIA should retain regulatory authority over all genetically engineered products to ensure safety and transparency: The Departments should continue in their role as independent regulators of genetically engineered products.
- » Health Canada and the CFIA should assess the safety of all genetically engineered foods and plants: The use of genetic engineering, including the new techniques of genome editing, should trigger regulation.

The Proposals:

Health Canada and the CFIA are proposing new regulatory guidance (not new regulations) regarding the safety assessment of genetically engineered (genetically modified or GM) foods and seeds. The Departments are proposing to **exempt many new genetically engineered foods and seeds from regulation**, meaning there would be no government safety assessments and government oversight for those products.

Specifically, many genetically engineered foods and seeds that have no foreign DNA (produced through **the new genetic engineering techniques of genome editing, also called gene editing**) would be exempt from regulation. The Departments would surrender their regulatory authority over these new GMOs and hand product safety assessments over to product developers.

The proposals would lead to the presence of some unregulated, unreported, genome-edited foods and seeds on the market.

The objections to the proposals:

The proposals are not science-based and would jeopardize safety

The proposals do not reflect scientific findings which show that genome editing can result in a range of possible unintended effects that could have impacts on food and environmental safety. Narrowly focussing on the presence of foreign DNA as a trigger for government safety assessment overlooks many **possible safety issues that could result from unexpected effects caused by the process of genome editing**. For example, unexpected effects could result in alterations to biochemical pathways or protein composition, which could have implications for food and environmental safety. The proposed guidance is not science-based or future-proof because it assumes the safety of many GMOs that have no foreign DNA, including those produced by genome editing processes that have not yet been developed.

- » [This science is discussed in a new report from CBAN and Testbiotech, March 2022](#) (available in English only).

The proposals would result in a profound loss of transparency and public trust

Health Canada and the CFIA are proposing to surrender their regulatory authority over many new genetically engineered products. This means that the Departments would **not have the ability to require information from product developers about these unregulated GMOs**, and they may go entirely unreported. Farmers in Canada may not be informed that their seeds are genome edited, consumers would have no information about which GMOs could be sold in stores, and **the federal government would not know all the GMOs that could be on the market or in our environment**. The government would lose the ability to track and trace GMOs, which would hamper the government's ability to respond to any possible safety, environmental, or economic impacts that may arise.

- » This loss of transparency is detailed in a [new report from CBAN](#), April 2022.

Information on genome editing from CBAN:
www.cban.ca/GenomeEditingReport

Updates and analysis on the proposals from CBAN:
www.cban.ca/NoExemptions

Who opposes the proposals:

- » [105 groups](#) wrote together to the Ministers of Health and Agriculture and Agri-Food to ask for transparency and government oversight over all genetically engineered foods and plants.
- » The [National Farmers Union](#) passed a resolution at their 2021 convention opposing the proposals.
- » The [Canadian Organic Trade Association](#) and [La Filière biologique du Québec](#) have asked the public to join them in opposing the changes because they jeopardize the future of organic food and farming.



The Canadian Biotechnology Action Network (CBAN) brings together 16 groups across Canada to research, monitor and raise awareness about issues relating to genetic engineering in food and farming. CBAN is a project on the shared platform of MakeWay Charitable Society.

cban.ca

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