

## Gene-editing rules clear first parliamentary hurdle

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Some parliamentary groups remain split on granting last generation biotech crops a different status from GMOs

Environment MEPs on Tuesday greenlit a December deal between the Council and the European Parliament on new EU rules for gene-edited crops.

A majority of 59 MEPs backed the proposal in the environment committee, while 24 voted against and two abstained.

The legislation introduces a two-tier regulatory system for plants developed with New Genomic Techniques (NGTs), with the first category (NGT1) delivering small mutations and treated as equivalent to conventional breeding. These crops will not be subject to the strict rules that currently apply to GMOs.

The second category of crops (NGT2), with more far-reaching DNA changes, will be treated as GMOs.

Some genetic traits achievable with NGTs include resistance to extreme weather and pests.

“Today’s vote means practical solutions for Europe’s farmers, stronger food security, supporting our efforts to combat climate change and opening Europe to further innovation,” said Swedish EPP lawmaker Jessica Polfjård, the Parliament’s lead negotiator on NGTs.

While the EPP largely backs the new legislation, the Socialists remain split.

Socialist lead negotiator Christophe Clergeau told Euractiv the group’s line in the committee was to vote against. However, several Socialist delegations – including Spain’s, the largest – back the new rules, setting up internal divisions ahead of a final plenary vote.

Critics warn the reform could strengthen large agrochemical companies by allowing them to patent key traits, potentially squeezing smaller breeders out of the market.

Other demands, also backed by Greens and NGOs, focused on clearly labelling NGT 1 crops to identify them – a request that did not materialise in the deal.

Labelling is “the only way to protect organic food production from contamination” with the new crops, said Luigi Tozzi of SAFE, a consumer group specialising in food policy.

EU ambassadors backed the deal in late December by a narrow margin. Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Germany, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia opposed the text but failed to form a blocking minority.

The Council is now expected to adopt its position formally – likely by the end of March – before sending the file back to Parliament for two final votes, under a longer-than-usual procedure as the file dates back to the previous parliamentary term.