

## **A SHORT Q&A TO HELP YOU UNDERSTAND THE CONSULTATION**

### **What are GMOs and what is gene editing?**

A GMO is a plant, animal or microbe whose genetic material has been altered in a laboratory to include desirable traits. First generation GMOs have had foreign genetic material inserted from genetically similar or different species, whereas newer gene editing techniques, such as CRISPR, allow for targeted changes to the organism's own DNA (mutagenesis).

### **Why are GMOs regulated?**

It is clear from the language used that the government is looking to deregulate (some) genetic technologies and the consultation can be seen as part of a wider deregulation agenda. This is incredibly worrying as the purpose of regulations such as those on GMOs are to protect people and the environment, even if some of the risks involved may be uncertain. Good regulations also provide a forum for a debate on the use of new technologies and the impacts on farmers and society more broadly.

### **Why is the government consulting the public?**

The consultation comes as a result of the defeat of a **House of Lords amendment** in July 2020, which already sought to widely open the door for deregulation of certain genetic engineering techniques. Proposers agreed to withdraw the amendment when the government promised to consult on the issue of gene-editing.

The consultation can also be seen as part of a wider deregulation agenda, with the Westminster government having openly asked businesses which regulations they would like to see scrapped.

### **How is this consultation relevant to members in the devolved nations?**

The proposed changes will only apply to England, yet they are very relevant to the devolved nations due to recent post-Brexit regulations that dictate that with regard to many issues (such as labelling rules and imports) it is likely going to be very difficult to maintain a diverse approach across the UK. We, therefore, strongly urge our members across England as well as Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland to respond.

### **What are process-based versus product-based regulations?**

Many of the questions in this consultation push for a 'product-based' approach to regulation as opposed to a 'process-based' approach. A product-based approach focuses on the end qualities of a product, rather than the technological processes that make a GMO a *genetically modified organism*.

Product-based regulations on GMOs can mainly be found in the United States, whereas the European Union has adopted a process-based approach which includes – following a 2018 ruling by the Court of Justice of the European Union – regulations for gene editing.

### **What are safety and non-safety concerns?**

Most regulations on technical innovations deal mostly with concerns that relate to risks for health and the environment. This often leads to technical debates on the (conflicted) science on these risks. For many agroecological and organic farmers the 'non safety' concerns will be as important as these risks as they deal with broader impacts on our food system and a future vision for sustainable food. They include all socioeconomic concerns but may also include cultural, religious and ethical objections.