

## 35 Nobel laureates implore MEPs to support new genomic techniques

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The [letter](#), coordinated by environmental NGO WePlanet, comes just days before the European Parliament’s environmental committee (ENVI) is set to vote on a proposal by the Commission to exempt NGTs from Europe’s prohibitive GMO regulations.

The plea is signed by pioneering biochemist Emmanuelle Charpentier and microbiologist Jennifer Doudna, who shared the 2020 Nobel prize for Physiology or Medicine for their groundbreaking discovery of CRISPR-cas9 - the gene-editing technique at the heart of the NGT debate. It is widely considered to be one of the most significant breakthroughs in the history of biology. Other signatories include world-renowned authors Steven Pinker and Peter Singer.

Using CRISPR-cas9 in plant breeding, argue the signatories, has the potential to dramatically reduce pesticide and fertiliser use in agriculture whilst increasing food security through the creation of climate-resilient plant varieties.

“NGTs hold immense promise for sustainable agriculture, enhanced food security and innovative medical solutions,” say the signatories. “We therefore encourage you to engage with the overwhelming majority of farmers and genuine experts, not with reactive anti-science lobbyists in the Brussels bubble. We implore you to vote in favour of NGTs.”

A failure to unlock the potential of NGTs would also risk a major economic opportunity cost, state the signatories, and “could cost the European economy [300 billion euros](#) annually in “benefits forgone” across multiple sectors.”

All eyes are now on the ENVI committee vote scheduled for 24 January. If the committee passes the proposal, this is expected to be followed on 5 February by a plenary vote in the Strasbourg Parliament. Tens of activists from the international WePlanet network “including young scientists and farmers” are expected to demonstrate outside the parliament building that day in favour of NGTs.

Dr Hidde Boersma PHD, the Dutch microbiologist who coordinated the letter, says: “The NGTs vote is a huge moment for the European Parliament. Will they embrace rationality and optimism, or cave into the anti-science fearmongering of an ill-informed minority? Now, more than ever, it’s time to embrace the optimism that Europe’s young scientists and farmers

represent.â??