

## Australia aims commercial cultivation of GM banana plants to tackle Fusarium wilt

26 May 2023 | News

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In Australia, the Queensland University of Technology (QUT) seeks the approval of the Gene Technology Regulator (OGTR) for commercial cultivation of genetically modified (GM) banana plants modified for resistance to Fusarium wilt tropical race 4, also known as Panama disease.

QUT does not intend to replace the current Cavendish banana growing in Australia with the GM banana plants, but rather to provide a safety net to the country's banana industry should it be heavily impacted by Panama disease. The GM banana also contains an antibiotic marker gene that was used for the selection of plants during research. The Gene Technology Regulator will assess risks to people and to the environment that commercial cultivation of GM banana plants may pose. A risk management plan to manage any risks posed by gene technology will also be published by the Gene Technology Regulator. The OGTR risk analysis for this application will be carried out in accordance with the Regulator's Risk Analysis Framework.

QUT has also applied to Food Standards Australia and New Zealand (FSANZ) for the fruit and other products of this GM banana to be sold as food. Permission for the GM banana and its products to be sold as food for human consumption in Australia requires a separate regulatory assessment and approval from FSANZ. The OGTR has published the following steps in the decision-making process for the cultivation of GM banana plants:

1. The Regulator is seeking advice from a broad range of experts, agencies and authorities, and relevant local councils, but no public consultation will occur yet.

2. The OGTR will prepare a consultation version of the Risk Assessment and Risk Management Plan (RARMP) for the application from advice received in Step 1.
3. A public consultation on the RARMP will occur and is anticipated to start in August 2023. Experts, agencies, and authorities will also be asked for further advice. There will be at least 30 days for submission of comments.
4. The RARMP will be finalized.
5. The Regulator decides whether or not to issue a license, and this decision must be made by the legislative due date.