Proposal for a Regulation on plants obtained by certain new genomic techniques and their food and feed, and amending Regulation (EU) 2017/625

Questions to the FSA

The FSA states, "The European Food Safety Authority has concluded that there are no new hazards specifically associated with NGTs in plants and that risk assessment of these techniques should be adapted accordingly."

- **Do you agree with this assessment?**

The terms new genomic techniques, precision breeding, genome editing, new breeding techniques or gene editing all describe a wide range of different techniques used for altering the genetic code or the DNA of genetic traits of interest in plants and/or animals.

The FSA has not undertaken a specific assessment of the EFSA conclusions on NGTs.

However, as noted in the FSA Board paper in September 2023, the FSA commissioned independent scientific advice from the Advisory Committee on Novel Foods and Processes (ACNFP), which advises the FSA on the safety of novel food and GM food, to inform our approach to understanding and managing the potential safety risk from precision-bred organisms (PBOs) in food and feed. ACNFP advice pointed out that there is no evidence that precision bred organisms, which includes gene edited organisms, are intrinsically more hazardous than traditionally bred organisms. However, because the technology is new and constantly developing, the FSA believes it necessary to introduce regulation to provide oversight and safeguards for public health and to build consumer trust.

The EU's proposed regulation would provide oversight and safeguards for public health – structured around 2 categories of plants. These categories distinguish varieties "considered equivalent to conventional plants" (NGT 1 plants) from all other plants obtained through NGTs (NGT 2 plants).

NGT 1 plants would be verified to establish equivalence with conventional plants whilst NGT 2 plants would go through the authorisation process, with a more in-depth risk assessment to ensure safety.

- **What is your assessment of the proposal for food and feed safety? For NGT1 plants, which would no longer be subject to stricter rules, what is your overall assessment of this? Do you consider the changes to be positive? Do you view there to be any risks or potential long-term adverse effects on human health, animal health and the environment?**

It is evident that this new technology has the potential to deliver practical impacts within food production such as improving the nutritional content of food or by making crops more resistant to drought or disease. The FSA's focus is on ensuring that the use of new technologies within food production does not pose a risk for consumers,

it delivers food that is at least nutritionally equivalent to conventional counterparts and is not misleading, even where rules across UK nations may differ.

We will continue to monitor the development of the NGT proposal through the institutions of the EU and its implementation. We feel that our evidence gathering is at too early a stage for the FSA to provide the committee with an assessment of the EU proposal, or any risks.

- **Would applying OR not applying the proposed Regulation have a significant impact specific to everyday life of communities in Northern Ireland in a way that is liable to persist?**

We are a science and evidence led organisation. As such, we feel that our engagement and the necessary evidence gathering is at too early a stage for the FSA to provide the committee with insights to what impacts may arise from this legislation which has not yet been finalised by the EU.

We have engaged with Defra. Until the EU's proposed regulation for NGTs is finalised, it is too soon to understand how it will apply in Northern Ireland. Defra officials are monitoring progress in the EU and engaging with the Commission when appropriate.

- **What are the consequences of not applying the proposed EU Regulation in Northern Ireland?**

We are a science and evidence led organisation. As such we feel that our engagement and the necessary evidence gathering is at too early a stage for the FSA to provide the committee with insights into what impacts may arise for this legislation which has not yet been finalised by the EU.

The FSA states "The Food Standards Agency has engaged with our counterparts in UK Government, and Food Standards Scotland on these proposals. The FSA is also working with Defra and FCDO to engage with EU institutions, Member States and stakeholders on gene editing."

- **Can you give more detail on these discussions?**

On 17 March 2025, the FSA worked with the UK Mission to the EU to host an event in Brussels, which included presentations on UK Precision Breeding legislation and the risk assessment process. The event was well attended by representatives from EU Member States and non-EU countries, European Commission officials, European Parliament officials, and NGOs.

Officials are monitoring progress in the EU and engaging with the Commission when appropriate.

Regular four-nation engagement has been taking place under the provisional Common Framework on Food and Feed Safety and Hygiene to discuss gene-editing, and collaboratively consider the new authorisation processes for precision bred food and feed.

The FSA Board has considered the Precision Breeding Act at a number of open meetings, specifically considering the FSA's remit in developing a regulatory framework for precision bred food and feed.

- **What are the views of stakeholders?**

This is still in proposal stage, which may be amended by the European Parliament and EU Member States. FSA officials will continue to monitor EU developments. Further, targeted engagement with other government departments and stakeholders will take place when the Regulation is published, through our existing engagement channels.

Research and engagement we conducted as part of work on the Precision Breeding Act (prior to the use of the term "precision breeding" in legislation) has helped us understand consumer interests in this space. We found that consumers have a low awareness and knowledge of gene edited food but that the more informed they became, the more accepting they were of gene edited food.

In England, there is significant stakeholder support for reforms to gene-editing across the supply chain, but some concerns from the anti-GM sector. UK Government is engaging with the organic sector to identify issues and solutions.