

Correspondence / Invitation from David Hughes – gene editing

We would be interested in arranging, if committee members would find it useful, an online zoom call or similar with the molecular geneticist and his colleague mentioned at the bottom of the letter (*below*). They wrote the attached leaflet, and are regularly asked by a number of organisations and groups to explain the scientific basis for objections to gene editing in agriculture. They would be very happy to discuss this with your committee, either as part of a scheduled meeting or, as that time is probably already committed, at another time of your choosing.

the original letter:

June 22nd 2020

Dear Members of the Senedd,

Gene editing - a danger to health and the economy in Wales

We hope you are all keeping safe in this unusual time.

Some of you may remember the undersigned from around 20 years ago, when we were amongst those opposing the introduction of genetically modified (GM) foods in Wales, and met with members of the Welsh Government, most of whom were also against genetically modified organisms (GMOs) on safety grounds.

The reason we're writing to you now is that there is an amendment proposed to the forthcoming Agriculture Bill which would pave the way for the latest generation of genetically modification procedures used in food crops and livestock development - known as gene editing - to be deregulated. Their products would no longer be classified as GMOs. This would mean little or no safety testing and no GMO labelling of foods, crops and livestock in Wales.

If the amendment is adopted, the Welsh government will be called upon to pass similar legislation for Wales, and will, as twenty years ago, be under considerable pressure from Westminster to do so.

The reasons we are bringing this to your attention are firstly the risks to health; and secondly because of the economic disaster that could result for Welsh farmers.

Health

Leading scientists warn that the **gene editing of our food crops could lead to the production of novel toxins and allergens**, because the outcome of the process is not precise. 61 European and American scientists have recently signed a statement drawing attention to the risks posed by gene-edited foods and crops. If introduced, these changes are irreversible.

Economic impact

Based on a 2018 ruling by the European Court of Justice, the EU regards gene editing as a form of genetic modification, giving rise to GMOs and thus requires all gene edited products to be safety tested and labelled. If gene editing is deregulated in Wales, this will mean all **Welsh farm produce - crops or livestock - will have to be GMO tested and labelled to comply with EU regulations if it is being exported to EU countries.** This would present an economic hurdle far more challenging than tariffs.

In addition, the UK as a whole will then be open to a flood of untested and unlabelled US GM (including gene edited) products, further undermining Welsh agriculture.

Obviously food safety & agriculture is the particular responsibility of Lesley Griffiths, and the Climate Change, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee, but we would like to inform you all as this would have an impact on all your constituencies.

Invitation

Molecular geneticist Dr Michael Antoniou and Claire Robinson MPhil outline concerns about gene editing in the linked leaflet, below. They would be happy to answer any questions you may have with regards to this issue, and we would be happy to arrange a zoom video conference call with them in the next week or ten days - prior to you being asked to vote on the issue - for any members of the Welsh Government.

Please contact David Hughes on this email address to indicate interest in attending a conference call.

Thank you for your attention.

With best regards

David Hughes
Helen Evans
Gwyndaf & Ide Evans
Tom Griffith-Jones
Morgan Francis

Dangers of gene editing:

<http://arrow.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Much-worse-than-chlorinated-chicken-V2.pdf>