

Precision-bred Organisms in Agriculture

The issue

'Precision bred organisms' (PBOs) are plants or animals altered using gene-editing techniques to create genetic changes that could occur through traditional breeding or natural mutation, but more quickly and precisely. Unlike older genetic modification methods, they do not contain DNA from non-sexually compatible species. PBOs are genetically modified organisms (GMOs), which are prohibited in organic farming under UK and international standards.

Due to the UK Internal Market Act 2020, PBOs produced in England under the Genetic Technology (Precision Breeding) Regulations 2025 can be marketed in Wales and Scotland despite stricter controls here. England's regulations do not require PBO labelling, traceability or supply-chain segregation, threatening organic supply chains and limiting consumer choice. A High Court legal challenge led by Beyond GM found in June 2026 that the UK Government failed to understand the significant consequences - for farmers, businesses, consumers and the organic sector - of removing transparency and labelling for gene-edited crops and foods.

Precision breeding is claimed to offer benefits including improved crop resilience, disease resistance, and reduced pesticide use, though the evidence base remains limited and long-term impacts are not yet established. The legislation introduced in England facilitates the development and commercialisation of PBOs without limiting precision breeding to particular outcomes. Plant breeding has become increasingly privatised, and commercial interests are not always aligned with societal need.

Why it matters to Wales

Wales and Scotland have retained the EU-derived approach to GMOs, meaning PBOs continue to be treated as GMOs here, creating a two-tier regulatory landscape across Great Britain. England's regulations shift the burden of avoiding PBOs entirely onto organic supply chains and introduce practical and financial challenges for certification and trade. Businesses and consumers will face significant personal cost and time finding out whether products contain PBOs, risking damage to consumer trust and major disruption to a UK organic market worth £3 billion. Devolved regions seeking EU alignment may also face trade barriers due to UK-wide deregulation.

Alignment with Welsh policy context

Wales has not adopted the same deregulatory approach. Our agricultural framework, established through the Agriculture (Wales) Act 2023 and underpinned by the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, emphasises whole-farm environmental, economic and social outcomes rather than technological fixes.

Contact/further information

Andrew Tuddenham, Head of Policy Cymru atuddenham@soilassociation.org
Amy Cartwright, Policy Assistant Cymru acartwright@soilassociation.org

www.soilassociation.org/who-we-are/soil-association-wales



Our perspective

Precision breeding raises serious concerns for the Soil Association. The term 'precision bred' was invented for the Precision Breeding Act 2023 and is not established in scientific discourse. Its definition is vague and appears shaped more by public palatability than by science. Without mandatory labelling and robust traceability, organic farmers face unfair competitive burdens while consumers lose the right to make informed choices. The technology is driven by corporate rather than public interest, and sustainability claims remain unproven at scale, risking distraction from the whole-farm, systems-based approaches that deliver for nature recovery and climate resilience. Where scientific uncertainty exists, the precautionary principle must apply — as it currently does in Wales under the Environment (Principles, Governance and Biodiversity Targets) (Wales) Act 2026.

What we're doing about it

The Soil Association is actively involved in Defra's Stakeholder Dialogue on Genetic Technologies, pushing for co-existence measures and supply chain transparency. Our Director of Policy has presented our case to the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, where MPs and industry representatives were sympathetic to our concerns. We are also working with partners across the UK and EU - including GM Freeze and IFOAM - to understand and respond to trade implications as EU law develops.

What we want Welsh policy makers to do:

- **Devolved competence and EU alignment:** maintain Wales' existing GMO framework, resist pressure to adopt England's permissive approach, advocate to Westminster for UK-wide mandatory labelling, and prioritise EU regulatory alignment to protect Welsh organic exporters
- **Biodiversity and nature recovery:** assess PBO implications for Wales' statutory nature recovery targets, including risks from genetic uniformity, input dependency, and intensification pressure
- **Public procurement:** ensure commitments under the proposed National Food Strategy protect organic and non-precision-bred supply chains
- **Animal welfare:** assess whether gene editing in animal production is consistent with the Animal Health and Welfare Framework

Evidence/references

- [Soil Association: Stop Genetic Modification](#)
- [Advisory Committee on Releases to the Environment \(ACRE\) annual report 2024 - GOV.UK](#)

Contact/further information

Andrew Tuddenham, Head of Policy Cymru atuddenham@soilassociation.org
Amy Cartwright, Policy Assistant Cymru acartwright@soilassociation.org

www.soilassociation.org/who-we-are/soil-association-wales

