

International Statement on Agricultural Applications of Precision Biotechnology

Agricultural innovation has played an essential role in increasing yields and productivity in support of growing, prosperous civilizations. Innovations in precision biotechnology, such as gene editing, have brought the promise of major improvements in terms of the ease and precision of introducing desirable traits into agricultural organisms, as compared to other breeding methods. Farmers continually need to broaden access to new tools to improve productivity, plant and animal health, and environmental sustainability; and to help address global challenges such as climate change, pest and disease pressures, the safety and security of worldwide food supplies, as well as meet consumer preferences and demands for healthier, higher quality foods at affordable prices. Government policies must continue to foster innovation including in the public sector and by small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and mitigate against unintended, unnecessary barriers to entry of agriculture products.

In some cases, precision biotechnology, such as gene editing, may generate organisms with characteristics similar to those obtainable through conventional breeding. In other cases, organisms generated may have characteristics similar to those introduced into organisms using recombinant-DNA technologies. In either case, the food, animal, and environmental safety of such products can be adequately addressed by existing regulatory frameworks for agricultural products and existing safety standards based upon the characteristics of the product or organism.

Governments are engaging in policy discussions on regulatory frameworks and global regulatory compatibility to encourage cross border research collaboration and to minimize potential disruptions to trade. Differing domestic regulatory approaches for products derived from precision biotechnology may result not only in international asynchronicity in approvals, but also in asymmetry in regulatory approaches, and create potential trade issues that could impede innovation. Recognizing the potential positive contributions of precision biotechnology to global agriculture, and emphasizing the importance of early action to identify avenues to minimize the trade impacts of differing regulatory approaches, the undersigned governments acknowledge that:

- Precision biotechnology products have the potential to play a critical role in addressing challenges facing agriculture production, including by contributing to increasing the supply of foods and other agricultural products, in a sustainable way.
- Collaborative research efforts and the ability to introduce useful products into the market, especially by SMEs and public sector researchers, are necessary to fully realize the promise of precision biotechnology.

- Given the differences internationally in approaches used to assess agriculture biotechnology, due consideration should be given by governments to avoid arbitrary and unjustifiable distinctions between end-products derived from precision biotechnology and similar end-products that are obtained through other production methods.
- To ensure appropriate science- and risk-based approaches consistent with protection of human, animal and plant health and the environment, due consideration should be given to the available sound scientific and technical information when updating or applying existing regulatory frameworks to products from precision biotechnology, and when using available flexibility within existing regulatory frameworks for agricultural products.
- Regulatory approaches necessary to help ensure the safety (for humans, animals, plants, and the environment) related to products derived from precision biotechnology should be science- and risk-based, transparent, predictable, timely, and consistent with relevant international trade obligations.
- Cooperative work by governments to minimize unnecessary barriers to trade related to the regulatory oversight of products of precision biotechnology, including by exploring opportunities for regulatory and policy alignment, should be pursued where possible.
- This collaborative work should promote constructive dialogues with trading partners and agriculture stakeholders on potential trade issues related to precision biotechnology, to support open and fair trade, and to encourage research and innovation.
- Public communication efforts can build trust in regulatory frameworks and improve the acceptability of future agricultural innovations that help farmers address the global challenges for production of abundant, safe and affordable food, feed, fiber, and energy in the 21st century.

Supporting Governments: xxx