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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## Co-op says #NotInMySupermarket to gene editing

*UK supermarket is the first to say it will not stock products made from untested and unregulated 'gene-edited' plants and animals*

UNITED KINGDOM—In response to a civil society appeal for UK supermarkets to back strong regulation of new gene-edited crops and animals, the Co-op has made a clear statement of its support.

The #NotInMySupermarket campaign is a response to the current UK government consultation on removing regulations and labelling from plants and animals in the food chain created using a new experimental genetic engineering technique called 'gene editing.'

A [joint letter](#), organised by Beyond GM and Slow Food UK, and signed by more than 50 UK leading civil society groups, academics and producers, calls for UK supermarkets to respect the wishes of their customers – the majority of whom, surveys show, oppose genetically engineered foods. It also asks the retailers to show leadership by supporting strong regulation of genetically engineered crops and foods and refusing to stock unregulated, unlabelled gene-edited foods in their stores.

In response to the letter, which has generated media coverage and a lively awareness-raising campaign on social media, Co-op Chief Executive, Jo Whitfield says:

“Genetic editing is one of several new technologies and innovations that may in the future help us to address the challenges facing our global food system. However, as with any new technology, it is important citizens are assured about food safety and the environmental and economic impacts are thoroughly understood before any decisions on widespread adoption are made. To this end, scrutiny by independent scientists and officials, as well as engagement with civil society, is essential. We would expect government to clearly set out how it intends to regulate gene editing, whilst providing clear conditions of use and any labelling requirements. We have no current plans to change our policy on prohibiting genetically modified (GM) organisms, which includes organisms produced by gene editing.”

Beyond GM and Slow Food UK are in dialogue with a number of other supermarkets about the letter, but are delighted that Co-op has made a clear first step that others can follow.

Shane Holland, Executive Chairman of Slow Food in the UK says "The Co-op is reassuring the majority of the UK public – who don't want GMO/gene edited foods on the shelves – that their wishes are respected. I am certain that they will gain a competitive advantage over other stores in doing so."

Pat Thomas Director of Beyond GM adds: “The Co-op’s thoughtful response shows respect for its customers but also for science. It demonstrates the understanding that gene-editing is a technology that creates GMOs and therefore should be regulated in order to protect people and the environment. This is a big step forward.”

[ENDS]

## Notes

- See [original press release](#).
- The [Consultation on the Regulation of Genetic Technologies](#) was launched by Defra on 7 January 2021 and will run until 17 March 2021.
- A 2020 [survey by Food Standards Scotland](#) found that, next to chlorinated chicken, genetically engineered foods are a top issue of concern for 57% of consumers. Another 2020 [study conducted by the National Centre for Social Research](#), which focused on Brexit-related issues, found that 59% wish to maintain a ban on genetically engineered crops. Yet another survey, in 2021, by the UK's [Economic and Social Research Council](#) found that 64% of those who took part were opposed to the cultivation of genetically engineered food. Although not specifically focused on GMOs a recent [Unchecked UK survey](#) of so-called "Red Wall" swing voters, most of whom voted to leave the European Union, showed strong opposition to the weakening of food laws, a move that would be seen as a betrayal of their Brexit vote.
- In 2018, after a two year long review of the science the [European Court of Justice ruled](#) that, scientifically and legally, gene-editing produced GMOs and should therefore be regulated in the same way as 'older' style genetic engineering.

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### **About Slow Food in the UK**

Slow Food in the UK is the umbrella body formed by Slow Food England, Slow Food Scotland, Slow Food Cymru and Slow Food Northern Ireland. Slow Food is a global, grassroots movement with thousands of members around the world that links the pleasure of food with a commitment to community and the environment.

### **About Beyond GM**

Beyond GM raises awareness of issues around the use of genetically engineered food and farming. Its aim is to raise the level of the debate around this complex subject and to ensure that a greater variety of stakeholders' voices are heard and the full range of issues and concerns are addressed.

### **For more information**

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