



ELECTION 2026

# Food, Farming and Genetic Technologies

## A Welsh Perspective for Responsible Governance

The May 2026 Senedd election is, by common agreement, the most consequential Welsh Parliament election since devolution began. More members, a new voting system, a more powerful legislature: the next Senedd will have both the capacity and the mandate to take bolder positions on the issues that shape Welsh life. One of those issues – underappreciated in most election coverage, central to Welsh food, farming and environment – is the question of genetically modified organisms in the food system.

Wales has, to date, maintained its commitment to precautionary GMO regulation, declining to adopt the Westminster Genetic Technology (Precision Breeding) Act 2023 or its 2025 Regulations. The

Welsh Government has been [explicit](#) from the beginning: 'We have no plans to revise the existing GMO Deliberate Release Regulations in Wales and will maintain our precautionary approach towards genetic modification.' The incoming Senedd has the opportunity to give that commitment legislative weight, to embed it in Wales's Good Food Wales agenda and to defend it against the constitutional pressures that threaten to undermine it.

This briefing sets out the background, the risks and the democratic case for treating genetic technology as a food system issue – central to how Wales grows, processes and eats its food – and not as a marginal question for scientists and regulators alone.

## Wales's Position: The Context

### A Devolved Choice

Agriculture, food safety and environmental protection are devolved competencies. The [Genetic Technology \(Precision Breeding\) Act 2023](#) – passed by Westminster without meaningful prior consultation with the Welsh Government – applies to England only. Wales continues to operate under the EU-derived GMO regulatory regime, which requires environmental risk assessment, labelling and traceability for all genetically modified

organisms, including those now renamed in England as 'precision bred organisms' (PBOs).

That choice reflects the values of the Welsh Government, of Welsh farming organisations, of Welsh food and drink businesses and of Welsh consumers. It reflects Wales's distinct approach to food policy, articulated through the [Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act 2015](#) and the [Environment \(Wales\) Act 2016](#), both of which embed long-term thinking, precaution and democratic accountability into Welsh governance in ways that

the Westminster Precision Breeding regulations conspicuously fail to do.

Wales also retains the right to maintain EU regulatory alignment in this area – a right worth defending not only for environmental reasons but for trade. Welsh food and drink exports, Welsh organic farming, Welsh geographical indications and Welsh premium produce all depend on the supply chain integrity that traceability and labelling provide – and that the Westminster regulations remove.

## The Pressure to Conform

Wales's regulatory autonomy faces a structural challenge. The [UK Internal Market Act 2020](#) establishes mutual recognition principles that require products lawfully marketed in England to be accepted across the UK. This means that precision bred products – unlabelled and untraceable – produced under the new English regulations can be placed on Welsh supermarket shelves regardless of Welsh regulatory preferences.

Westminster has been clear about this intent. Wales can restrict the growing of PBOs within its borders, but its ability to prevent their sale in Welsh markets is severely constrained by the Internal Market Act. This is not simply a legal technicality. It is a direct challenge to the meaningful exercise of Welsh devolved powers over food safety.

The ongoing judicial review of the Precision Breeding Regulations 2025, [with a High Court hearing in May 2026](#), tests directly whether these regulations are lawful – including whether they breach the Human Rights Act, the Aarhus Convention and the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety. The outcome matters for Wales as well as England. The next Senedd should be fully briefed on, and prepared to act upon, its findings.

## Precision Breeding Is Genetic Engineering

The language of 'precision breeding' is a political invention, not a biological description. Precision bred organisms are the products of genetic engineering – laboratory-based interventions in the DNA of living organisms. The UK Government acknowledged this in the first part of the Genetic Technology Act itself, even as its public

communications systematically avoided the language.

This is not a matter of semantics. It determines the appropriate regulatory framework, the scope of environmental risk assessment required and the information that consumers and farmers are entitled to receive. To call a genetically engineered organism a 'precision bred' one is to reframe the debate in ways that foreclose legitimate public scrutiny. The next Senedd should use accurate language and require others to do the same.

## The Case for Regulatory Continuity

The Westminster government has argued that precision breeding is simply a faster form of conventional breeding and therefore requires no special regulatory scrutiny. This argument is scientifically contested and legally consequential.

The EU's [2018 European Court of Justice ruling](#), the EU's ongoing cautious approach to new genomic techniques, the Swiss requirement for dignitary assessments of living beings: these reflect a broadly held international view that caution is warranted.

New research has demonstrated that gene editing can cause [lasting disruption to genome function](#) through what scientists describe as 'chromatin fatigue' – even when DNA appears to have repaired itself. The Westminster government's assumption that precision equals safety is not established science. It is a regulatory choice made in the absence of evidence, not on the basis of it.

The EU is now considering its own revised regulations for gene edited organisms (called New genomic techniques or NGTs in Europe). These will also be lighter-touch and yet indications are that there will still be important precautionary differences between the English regime and those in Europe that could, for instance, impact trade.

Wales's [rejection](#) of the 2023 English Act and its Regulations is not just a political gesture. It is the application of the precautionary principle to an area where the evidence base remains incomplete and the consequences – genetic spread in open ecosystems, impacts on biodiversity, contamination of non-GMO supply chains – may be irreversible.

# Wales's Food System: What's at Stake

## The Good Food Wales Agenda

Wales's food and drink sector is worth £27 billion and supports more than, 200,000 jobs – 17% of the country's total workforce. It produces numerous geographical indication (GI) products – Welsh lamb, Welsh beef, Traditional Welsh Caerphilly cheese – and the government is investing heavily in organic farming to boost biodiversity and climate goals.

Wales has also been a pioneer in food policy. The [Food \(Wales\) Bill](#) and the broader [Food Sense Wales agenda](#) represent a serious attempt to approach food as a whole system – connecting agricultural production, environmental sustainability, public health, food access and cultural identity. The Well-being of Future Generations Act requires Welsh public bodies to act in ways that meet the needs of the present without compromising future generations.

These frameworks provide exactly the right context for evaluating genetic technologies in food and farming. A technology that cannot be labelled, traced or monitored is incompatible with a food system based on transparency and accountability.

A technology whose long-term ecological consequences are unknown is incompatible with a



*Trust begins with transparency. Most consumers want to know if their food has been genetically engineered.*

government required by statute to consider future generations. The next Senedd should make this connection explicit and ensure that GMO policy is evaluated through the lens of the Well-being Goals.

## Organic and Sustainable Farming

Wales has a strong and growing organic sector and the Welsh Government has invested in agri-environment schemes that reward farmers for sustainable land management. Organic and biodynamic farmers have a legal obligation to avoid GMO contamination – an obligation they cannot fulfil if PBO products circulate in the supply chain unlabelled and untraced.

The removal of traceability under the Westminster regulations means that the tools needed to protect organic and other certified farming systems are being systematically dismantled – not by Welsh choice, but by Westminster decision. Co-existence between GMO and non-GMO farming is not possible without detection, mandatory notification and a liability framework that places the costs of contamination on those who introduce novel organisms, not on the farmers who must avoid them.

## Consumer Choice and Democratic Trust

Eight in ten people in the UK want all genetically modified organisms to be [labelled and traceable](#) through the food chain. In the absence of labelling, consumers cannot exercise meaningful choice or 'shop their values'.

The Food Standards Agency's own [public consultation on precision bred food](#) found clear public support for labelling – and was subsequently set aside. When governments remove that information, they damage trust – in the food system, in regulators and in democratic institutions

Wales has an opportunity to be a jurisdiction that takes consumer preference and consumer trust seriously. A Senedd that commits to meaningful labelling, transparent supply chains and genuine public engagement in food governance is a Senedd that demonstrates what devolution is for.

# Five Policy Asks for the Next Senedd

Beyond GM calls on all parties contesting the May 2026 Senedd election to commit to the following:

## **1. Affirm and legislate Wales's precautionary approach to GMOs**

The next Welsh Government should not only reaffirm its commitment to the existing GMO regulatory regime, but should explore primary legislation that gives that commitment durable legal expression. The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act provides both the mandate and the framework for such legislation. A formal legislative statement of Wales's precautionary approach would signal to farmers, food businesses, consumers and investors that Welsh food standards are not subject to reversal by Westminster administrative action.

## **2. Integrate GMO and PBO policy into the Good Food Wales agenda**

The next Senedd should require any national food strategy, food policy statement or agri-environment review produced by the Welsh Government to treat genetic technology as a central food system and environmental question, not a specialist regulatory matter. The question of whether, how and on what conditions genetically modified organisms enter the Welsh food system should be explicitly addressed within the framework of the Well-being Goals, including the goals of a Resilient Wales, a Healthier Wales and a Globally Responsible Wales.

## **3. Defend Welsh devolved food standards against the Internal Market Act**

The next Senedd should establish a cross-party committee to examine how the UK Internal Market Act 2020 affects Wales's ability to enforce its own food safety and environmental standards, with

specific attention to GMOs and precision bred organisms. It should press Westminster for a formal review of the Act's application to devolved food safety powers and engage closely with the outcome of the current judicial review of the Precision Breeding Regulations 2025.

## **4. Protect Welsh organic and sustainable farming from PBO contamination**

The next Welsh Government should introduce mandatory co-existence measures – notification requirements, buffer zones, detection protocols and liability provisions – to ensure that farmers operating under organic, agri-environment or geographical indication schemes are protected from the risks of genetic contamination. These measures should be accompanied by investment in detection methodology and by a clear commitment that the costs of any contamination fall on developers and operators, not on affected farmers.

## **5. Ensure genuine public participation in decisions about genetic technologies**

Wales has a strong tradition of citizen participation and deliberative democracy. The next Senedd should draw on that tradition by establishing a formal citizens' engagement process – building on the model of the Welsh Citizens' Assembly – to consider how genetic technologies in food and farming should be governed. This should be embedded in the legislative process for any food or agricultural technology policy and should result in binding obligations on the Welsh Government to explain how public views have shaped its decisions.

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## **About Beyond GM**

Beyond GM is a UK-based organisation working to raise public awareness and engagement in the debate about genetic modification in food and farming. We do not reject genetic modification outright, but we believe there are many legitimate and unanswered questions about the use of genetic technologies in our food system. We support an agroecological model of farming that is transparent, democratic and ecologically responsible. Find us at: [beyond-gm.org](http://beyond-gm.org)