

The Genetic Technology (Precision Breeding) Act

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- The Genetic Technology (Precision Breeding) Act gained Royal Assent in March 2023. The Act essentially removes precision bred (for example gene edited) animals from GMO regulations and allows the marketing of such animals in England, but this is subject to several safeguards protecting animal health and welfare.
- The Act states that anyone wanting to market a precision bred animal will have to submit a health and welfare declaration with supporting evidence to Defra's Secretary of State, which will be assessed by a welfare advisory body, and once the animals are marketed there will be a requirement to report information about the health and welfare of the animals and their progeny.
- Secondary legislation will be needed to bring the new measures into force, which is expected to take several years.
- The Animal Welfare Team are currently in the early stages of designing the application process and looking at what sort of evidence needs to be submitted by livestock breeding companies. To support this work, Defra have commissioned Scotland's Rural College (SRUC) to develop a welfare assessment proposal for precision bred pigs, poultry and salmon (as the species closest to being commercialised in England) – this project is still underway, due to complete late summer. As part of this project, Defra asked SRUC to run a survey amongst equine organisations to explore the level of interest in precision breeding and the likelihood of it being used – the survey has recently closed, and we want to thank everyone who took part.
- Ministers committed in Parliament to phase in regulations for animals, starting with farmed animals. Defra is keen to keep talking to different sectors and organisations about their interest in using precision breeding technologies.