

Anti-science vandals destroy Italy's first open field trial with gene edited rice to test resistance against fungal disease

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Euroseeds strongly condemns the destruction of Italy's first open field trial of gene-edited rice, which was targeted by vandals on June 21 in northern Italy. The experimental field trial, aimed at testing the resistance of the gene-edited rice to fungal diseases, represented a significant step forward for sustainable and productive agriculture.

The rice plants, named 'RIS8imo' (pronounced 'risottimo'), are the product of advanced CRISPR gene-editing technology. These plants contain targeted mutations designed to reduce the need for fungicides, thus promoting more sustainable farming practices. The RIS8imo rice had shown promising results in laboratory conditions showing reduced disease symptoms when infected with fungal pathogens.

New Genomic Techniques, such as gene editing in plants, offer the same outcomes as traditional breeding methods but with greater speed, precision, and efficiency. "The destruction of this field trial is an unacceptable criminal act of vandals that disrespect the law and public order. It is also an act against science and a significant and disappointing setback for the plant research and breeding community in Europe. Outdoor trials are a crucial element for testing and gaining a better understanding of plant biology and the potential benefits of targeted mutations for developing improved crop varieties", states Garlich von Essen, Secretary General & CEO of Euroseeds.

The trial, led by Vittoria Brambilla's team at the University of Milan, was the first in Italy to receive authorization under a new law passed in 2023, which streamlined the procedures for field trials of certain gene-edited plants. The legal framework ensured that the trial was conducted in full compliance with all regulations.

"We strongly condemn this act of destruction and obstruction of lawful research, says von Essen. "It is essential that the freedom to conduct research within the regulatory framework is respected. This incident not only hampers scientific progress but also deprives European citizens of reaping the potential benefits that arise from years of dedicated research aimed at reducing the environmental impact of rice cultivation", von Essen concludes.

Euroseeds urges the authorities to take swift action to support the researchers and to prevent such incidents in the future. It is vital that the scientific community is given the opportunity to remedy the damage inflicted and to continue their important work without fear of vandalism.



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