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Parties disagree over regulation of new genetic modification methods

Responses to Gene Ethics' election questionnaire show major policy differences between political parties on how new methods of genetic modification (GM) such as CRISPR should be regulated.

"The Australian Greens, Science Party and Health Australia Party all agree genetically modified organisms produced using methods such as CRISPR should be assessed for safety before release into our environment and food chain," says Bob Phelps, Executive Director of Gene Ethics.

"Yet the Coalition Government [quietly announced \(1\)](#) the deregulation of several new GM techniques the day before the Federal election was called."

"The ALP did not answer our election questions. It appears determined to keep its policy options open while the Coalition guts GM regulation."

Louise Sales, from Friends of the Earth's Emerging Tech Project says, "changes to Australia's Gene Technology Regulations that the Coalition snuck through will allow a raft of new GM animals, plants and microbes to enter our environment and food chain with no safety assessment and likely no labelling. These include [super-muscled pigs](#), (2) cows and goats, and [non-browning mushrooms](#)." (3)

[Recent research \(4\)](#) shows the deregulated techniques pose new risks that must be assessed. Another recent [peer-reviewed study \(5\)](#) concludes that assuming these GM techniques are safe "lacks a robust scientific basis".

"We are deeply concerned that the two major parties have abandoned a scientific approach to GM regulation. Instead they are bowing to pressure from the GM crop industry which seeks to avoid all GM regulation – including labeling," concludes Ms Sales.

The GM crop and chemical company Bayer [donated](#) \$40,600 (6) to Labor and \$42,540 to the Coalition in the 2017-18 financial year. **The GM crop industry lobby group CropLife [donated](#)** \$34,271 (7) to Labor and \$22,300 to the Coalition. **CropLife's CEO [Matthew Cossey \(8\)](#)** is a former senior official and campaign director for the ALP.

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1. <http://www.health.gov.au/internet/ministers/publishing.nsf/Content/health-media-rel-yr2019-mckenzie026.htm?OpenDocument&yr=2019&mth=04>
2. <https://www.nature.com/news/super-muscly-pigs-created-by-small-genetic-tweak-1.17874>
3. <https://www.chemistryworld.com/news/crispr-edited-mushroom-dodges-regulation/1010298.article>
4. <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fbioe.2019.00031/full>
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6. <https://periodicdisclosures.aec.gov.au/Donor.aspx?SubmissionId=68&ClientId=38030>
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