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Sanatech wins Canadian approval for gene-edited tomato rich in GABA

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In a significant development for the future of gene-edited foods, Canadian regulators have cleared a high-GABA tomato developed by Japan's Sanatech Life Science Co. Ltd., determining that the product can be marketed as a conventional food rather than being subject to the country's more stringent novel food regulations.

Following an assessment by Health Canada's Novel Foods Section, authorities concluded that the company's Sicilian Rouge High GABA tomato satisfies existing plant-breeding guidelines and does not meet the regulatory definition of a novel food. The decision effectively places the gene-edited variety in the same safety category as tomatoes developed through traditional breeding methods.

As part of Canada's food transparency framework, the product will be added to the federal government's public registry of non-novel foods approved for commercial use.

The ruling represents another important signal of how regulators are increasingly distinguishing between gene editing and conventional genetic modification technologies. Unlike traditional genetically modified organisms (GMOs), which often involve the introduction of foreign DNA, gene-editing techniques such as CRISPR enable scientists to make precise changes within a plant's existing genome.

Sanatech's tomato was developed using CRISPR-Cas9 technology and first entered the Japanese market in 2021. The variety was designed to contain significantly elevated levels of gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA), a naturally occurring amino acid associated with several potential health benefits, including support for healthy blood pressure regulation.

According to the company, the gene-edited tomato contains approximately four to five times more GABA than conventional tomato varieties, positioning it within a growing category of crops engineered to deliver enhanced nutritional value.

The Canadian approval marks a strategic milestone for Sanatech as it seeks to expand beyond its home market and establish a presence in North America, where regulatory approaches to gene-edited crops continue to evolve.

Industry observers view the decision as further evidence of a broader shift in agricultural biotechnology policy. Regulators in several countries have begun adopting product-based assessments that focus on the characteristics and safety profile of the final crop rather than the breeding technology used to develop it.

For developers of gene-edited foods, such distinctions can substantially reduce commercialization timelines and regulatory complexity, accelerating the introduction of new varieties with improved nutritional, agronomic or sustainability traits.

Sanatech said the clearance strengthens its international growth strategy and will support efforts to expand production and distribution of the High GABA tomato across North American markets.

The decision also highlights the growing commercial momentum behind gene-edited foods, a sector increasingly viewed as one of agriculture's most promising frontiers for enhancing crop quality, consumer health and food-system resilience without introducing foreign genetic material.

As countries continue to refine their regulatory frameworks, Canada's endorsement of the High GABA tomato may serve as a bellwether for how future gene-edited crops are assessed and brought to market worldwide.