

# China too has a GMO debate

The Chinese government is moderately in favour of the development of genetically modified (GM) plant varieties but Chinese citizens on social media are overwhelmingly opposed. These findings come from the PhD research of Yan Jin.

Since 2002, the Chinese government has allowed imports of over 50 GM crops for use in animal feed or building materials. But so far the government has not given permission for GM crops to be grown in China, with the exception of a few non-food crops. The Chinese ministry of Agriculture plans to gradually introduce the cultivation of GM crops. The government has invested 35 billion dollars in the development of such crops.

But Chinese consumers are critical of GM crops. Jin investigated the online

debate about GMOs on Weibo, the Chinese Twitter, between 2013 and 2020. That debate was dominated by anonymous opponents of GM crops. Jin found 778 clear opinions about GM crops, 632 of which were

**Chinese consumers are critical of GM crops, in part because of various scandals**

opposed to such crops. That is because of various scandals. For example, the Chinese government was not transparent about the approval of insect-resistant GM rice, whereupon Greenpeace proved in 2014 that GM rice was being grown in China without official permission. That led to a lot of criticism on Weibo.

Jin's results are in line with previous Chinese research, which showed that the Chinese people distrust the government when it comes to food safety — as the melamine affair showed. <sup>AS</sup>