

The German Constitutional Court has issued an opinion upholding severe restrictions on the use of genetically modified plants. *Science* [reports](#):

“With the possibility to deliberately make changes in the genome, genetic engineering influences the elementary structures of life,” the court wrote. “The consequences of such interventions can be, if any, difficult to undo.”

The court seems to consider GM crops an unfinished experiment. “In view of science’s still unfinished assessment of the long-term consequences of the use of genetic engineering, the legislature has a special duty to be careful and to consider Article 20a, which includes responsibility to future generations and protecting the natural environment,” the court wrote. Article 20a is an article in Germany’s Basic Law, added in 1994, that declares that the state “shall protect the natural bases of life.” Today’s ruling is the first time the high court has referred to the article in a decision.

Although many environmentalists may reflexively applaud the decision — and there *are* genuine bases for concern about GMOs that justify caution — we will need real breakthroughs in order to feed an extra three billion people by mid-century. Increased yields also reduce the pressure to convert rainforests to grasslands, protecting diversity and carbon sinks. So there are arguments to be made in favor of genetic engineering as well.