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## CASE STUDY

# Genetwister— driving innovation in plant biotechnology

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# Introduction

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Genetwister Technologies B.V., the Wageningen-based biotech powerhouse, stands at the heart of genetic crop innovation, celebrating nearly three decades of pioneering research.

Led by CEO Michiel van Eijk, the company has established itself as an essential R&D partner for the agricultural industry. Genetwister's success is built not only on its proven innovation, but a strong and productive relationship with Netherlands-based patent attorneys, EP&C.



**Patented by**

**Mark  
Jolink**

I've been a patent attorney at EP&C since 2010, with a background in bioprocess engineering and a Ph.D. in innovation management. My work bridges science, business strategy, and legal thinking, helping inventors turn inventions into successful commercial ventures.

# The core of genetic innovation

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Established in 1998, Genetwister is a long-established company focused on driving innovation in the field of plant biotechnology. With 25 years of proven innovation, Genetwister specializes in molecular breeding and bioinformatics for agricultural, horticultural, and ornamental plants. Their overarching mission is to develop and apply innovative methods, know-how, and genetic resources to create value for their customers, helping breeders achieve faster and better results.

Genetwister is structured around four specialized expertise teams: Genomics (wet lab activities like high-throughput sequencing and DNA analysis), Bioinformatics (analyzing complex omics data), Software Development (creating tools and databases like CROPAware for actionable insights), and Genetics & Breeding (translating generated information to advance breeding programs).

Michiel van Eijk stresses that R&D is truly “in their DNA,” positioning Genetwister as a unified R&D team and an extension of its clients’ research departments. They are instrumental in scouting for, validating, and building upon new technologies from sources like academia and commercial settings. Their research, often conducted through multi-year programs (sometimes four to six years long), addresses high-risk areas essential for industry advancement.

This dedication to deep, long-term innovation directly supports vital societal goals, including improving crop quality, promoting sustainable farming, and ensuring a reliable food supply. Genetwister addresses complex traits such as yield, taste, shelf life, and crop resilience. They have developed advanced, proprietary tools, such as the Leafy lead discovery platform, that enable researchers to quickly identify the causal genes for complex traits. This capability recently led to a notable success, in which Genetwister’s combined knowledge identified the real causal gene for a trait, correcting previously published literature and providing immediate value to breeding programs.

# A foundation built on collaboration

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Genetwister operates as a daughter company of four major multinational vegetable seed breeding companies: East-West Seed, Bejo, Sakata Seed Corporation, and Known-You Seed. These shareholders also constitute the vast majority of their clientele.

The value Genetwister provides to its clients is clearly reflected in their feedback:

- Bejo Seeds credits Genetwister with helping them stay at the forefront of innovation.
- East-West Seed states that Genetwister helps them grow quality sciences, quality seeds and quality vegetables.
- Sakata Seed Corp. notes that Genetwister has significantly contributed to improving the efficiency and speed of their breeding programs.
- Known-You Seed Co. appreciates Genetwister's long-standing assistance, noting their collaboration has spanned a decade.

Michiel highlights that Genetwister operates differently from a typical transactional service company; they maintain close collaboration with the scientists and pre-breeders in the seed companies, engaging as partners who share the cost and risks of innovative R&D.



## EP&C: A constructive and professional partnership

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As a company dedicated to high-level innovation, the protection of proprietary technology and Intellectual Property (IP) is critical. Genetwister relies on EP&C to navigate this complex landscape. Michiel van Eijk, who is an inventor on 30 patent families, deeply values the role of IP in value creation and finds it stimulating for his employees, reinforcing their position at the forefront of innovation.

Michiel describes the collaboration with EP&C as productive, pleasant, and constructive. He is highly impressed with the patent firm's efficiency, speed, and professionalism. He specifically admires the patent attorneys' capacity to understand and get to the core of Genetwister's intricate IP, and to relate it to innovations across diverse fields.

The working relationship is characterized by constant exchange and communication. When Genetwister has a potential high-impact process or protocol, particularly from their Genomics (wet lab) team, Michiel is quick to reach out to EP&C, often at the idea stage. This early engagement is vital because waiting too long to develop protocols perfectly is risky in a fast-paced environment. EP&C then plays a crucial role in validation, performing prior art analysis, and providing essential advice on opportunities and risks.

Michiel relies on EP&C's expertise to help them secure the broadest possible claims when establishing IP. He appreciates the support provided by Mark Jolink and Daphne Huberts, noting that Daphne brings specific connections to the plant field, having trained at Bejo Seeds (one of Genetwister's shareholders).

Crucially, Genetwister finds that EP&C shares key operational characteristics that enable a strong partnership: transparency, accountability, and honesty. Michiel notes: "I have absolutely no doubt about the transparency that is there," ensuring an open line of communication necessary for dealing with the complexities of patent prosecution.

By partnering with EP&C, Genetwister successfully protects its proprietary technology, ensuring that its constant innovations—which must be accurate, scalable, and universally applicable across various crops—contribute maximally to its commercial objectives and continue to drive genetic advancements for a better global food future.



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