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## **Think tank applauds bold moves by UK Ministers to boost access to genetic technologies in agriculture**

Pro-innovation think tank Science for Sustainable Agriculture (SSA) has welcomed two recent announcements by UK Ministers which promise to boost prospects for the use of new genetic technologies in agriculture and food production: confirmation of plans to implement the Precision Breeding Act and the launch of a new Regulatory Innovation Office (RIO).

On Monday 30 September, Defra food security minister Daniel Zeichner MP [confirmed](#) that, as soon as Parliamentary time allows, the Government will press ahead with the introduction of secondary legislation to implement the Genetic Technology (Precision Breeding) Act 2023. This will provide a route to market for gene edited products in England, and so speed up the delivery of major benefits to society, for example through more sustainable and climate resilient farming systems, reduced food waste, and improved nutrition.

In July, SSA co-ordinated a [joint letter](#) signed by more than more than 50 leading organisations and individuals across the scientific, food processing, farming, breeding, veterinary and input supply sectors, calling for early implementation of the Precision Breeding Act and underlining how the objectives of the Precision Breeding Act directly complement the Government's strategic commitments to economic growth and better regulation.

Encouragingly, Mr Zeichner strongly emphasised the economic opportunities afforded by transforming our regulatory environment, noting that while gene editing startups had raised over \$2.7bn since 2012, globally, only 5% of venture capital investment had gone to Europe-based companies compared with 80% to US-based companies.

In a second positive development, Science and Technology Secretary Peter Kyle has today (8 October) [announced](#) the launch of a new Regulatory Innovation Office (RIO), which aims to deliver on Labour's manifesto commitment to reduce the burden of red tape and speed up access to new technologies that improve our daily lives.

Engineering biology, which includes the use of synthetic biology and biotechnology, has been singled out as one of the four innovation areas the RIO will focus on initially, opening up the potential to “...*make food production more efficient and sustainable such as through pest resistant crops and cultivated meat. The new RIO will help regulators to bring those products to market safely and more quickly - realising the environmental and health benefits they can bring to our lives.*”

When the UK currently has one of the worst-performing regulatory systems for the authorisation of GM crop imports, even slower than the EU, the new Regulatory Innovation Office's focus on speeding up approvals, providing regulatory certainty and reducing unnecessary delays to help unlock innovation is extremely welcome.

Together these developments will send a clear signal to potential investors and trading partners that Britain is 'open for business' when it comes to the use of new technologies such as gene editing and GMOs in agriculture and food production.

In the context of a changing climate, war and geopolitical instability, and when [recent data](#) from the Food Standards Agency indicate that a quarter of the UK population are 'food insecure', ensuring a reliable and affordable supply of safe, healthy food does not lie in turning back the clock, as some would have us believe. It lies in embracing the potential of new technologies and scientific innovation.

These recent announcements strengthen prospects for more proportionate and timely regulation, and so boost the potential for genetic innovation in agriculture to deliver benefits for people and the planet.

### **Notes**

Science for Sustainable Agriculture (SSA) is a new policy and communications platform, offering a focal point for information, comment and debate around modern, sustainable agriculture and food production. Supported by an independent advisory group of political, scientific and industry leaders from a range of sectors and backgrounds, SSA's aim is to promote a conversation rooted in scientific evidence, rather than ideology. Science for Sustainable Agriculture provides a platform for like-minded individuals and organisations to champion and explain the vital role of science and technology in safeguarding our food supply, tackling climate change and protecting the natural environment, as well as to expose, comment on and challenge unscientific positions or policy decisions in relation to sustainable agriculture.

Further information about Science for Sustainable Agriculture is available [here](#).

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