



## NEWS RELEASE

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### **APPG chair urges first RIO chair Lord Willetts to help unleash the potential of UK agri-science**

Welcoming this week's [announcement](#) that former science minister Lord David Willetts will chair the Government's new Regulatory Innovation Office (RIO), George Freeman MP, chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Science and Technology in Agriculture, has underlined the need for smarter regulation of agri-science innovations which can help Britain's farmers produce 'more from less.'

RIO is tasked with cutting unnecessary red tape which prevents or delays beneficial new technologies coming to market.

Mr Freeman, former Minister of State for Science, Technology and Innovation, who worked with Lord Willetts to launch the UK Agritech Industrial Strategy in the Coalition, said the appointment signalled a genuine cross-party commitment to accelerating the pace of innovation needed to deliver on the grand challenges of climate change, food and energy security, and green growth.

He added that it was particularly good news for agri-science, which 12 years ago Lord Willetts had included among the [Eight Great Technologies](#) in which the UK is or can be a global leader, and which will drive a new, high-tech revolution needed to feed, fuel, connect and care for more people, using fewer resources and with reduced environmental impact.

"Lord Willetts understands the importance of agri-science," said Mr Freeman. "When he spoke to the All-Party Group as science minister more than a decade ago, David highlighted the critical role of agricultural science and innovation in feeding a rapidly growing world population while addressing the pressures of climate change and finite natural resources."

"He also laid down a clear challenge to the UK agri-food sector to do more to communicate and celebrate the fact that modern agriculture is a high-tech, scientific endeavour, when it is too often presented in old-fashioned and traditional terms.

"Fast-forward 12 years, and the food security challenges David described back then have intensified, exacerbated by global conflict and geopolitical uncertainty."

"With our good soils, temperate climate, professional farming sector and world-class agri-science base, Britain is well-placed to produce more food, more sustainably, and to reduce our dependence on imports.

“But the reality is that our agricultural productivity growth lags behind other countries, our national average yields in key crops are flat-lining, and our import reliance in some sectors, including fresh produce, vegetable oil and protein crops, is at record highs.

“One of the challenges we face is that, in many sectors of British agriculture, under-resourced or over-precautionary regulatory processes stifle access to farming innovations which are readily available to producers elsewhere.

“So, as well as unlocking game-changing new technologies in engineering biology, AI and autonomous vehicles, a key role for the new Regulatory Innovation Office must be to identify opportunities to make our existing regulations work smarter, and to accelerate current approval timelines, benchmarked against international competitors, in areas such as plant breeding, crop protection, novel foods, alternative feeds, GMO imports and feed additives.

“This will play a key role in freeing up UK farmers to produce ‘more from less’ – more food with fewer inputs, less greenhouse gas emissions and a reduced environmental footprint,” said Mr Freeman.

## **ENDS**

### **Notes**

The All-Party Parliamentary Group on Science and Technology in Agriculture exists to promote debate among politicians and other stakeholders on the value and role of scientific innovation in UK agriculture. The Group works to ensure that the Government’s support for agri-science is maintained and strengthened, that the regulatory environment is evidence-based and enabling, and that the contribution of modern agriculture to our society, economy and environment is valued and understood as widely as possible.

### **For further information contact:**

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