

Text of letter sent by email from Dr Tina Barsby OBE to Rt Hon George Eustice MP, Defra Secretary of State, 22 May 2020

Dear George

On behalf of NIAB, as a founding stakeholder of the APPG on Science and Technology in Agriculture, I am writing in support of Julian Sturdy MP's recent letter calling on the Government to support an enabling amendment to the Agriculture Bill on gene editing.

I wanted you to be aware of the level of support for this simple change across scientific leaders and research institutions UK-wide. Indeed scientists are not only indicating their support but willing to be vocal and active in standing up for the right to access the same research tools and technologies as colleagues around the world, and most importantly to strengthen their ability to apply their excellent science in the public interest and for the public good. Key supporters of Julian Sturdy's letter and the APPG initiative are listed below my signature.

We understand that the objective of this amendment would be to confer new Ministerial powers to consult on and, if appropriate, change the definition of GMO in the Environmental Protection Act such that gene-edited organisms whose DNA changes could have occurred naturally or through traditional breeding methods should not be regulated as GM.

A revised definition of GMO compatible with the internationally recognised Cartagena Protocol definition would effect that change and re-align the UK with the regulatory position of many countries around the world whose scientists, plant breeders, farmers and consumers are already benefiting from the advances made possible through these precise breeding techniques.

I know from our previous interactions that you take a keen personal interest in crop science, plant breeding and genetic innovation, as well as in farm animal science. You and fellow Defra Ministers have repeatedly indicated your disagreement with the European Court ruling of July 2018 classifying newer forms of mutagenesis as GM techniques, and we welcome your stated ambition to set aside this decision.

Now is the time to take positive action on this issue, not only to support a productive, competitive and resilient food and farming sector in the UK with access to the same tools as producers elsewhere, but also to improve British scientists' ability to support major global challenges such as food and nutrition security, climate change and sustainable development. As we chart our recovery from the devastating Covid-19 crisis, ensuring our scientists have access to the best available technologies and can conduct their research in a proportionate and enabling regulatory environment is absolutely critical.

I would urge you strongly to back this proposed amendment and send a clear signal that the UK is open for business and willing to support scientific innovation in the national interest.

With best wishes

Tina

Dr Tina Barsby OBE, Chief Executive, NIAB

Professor Angela Karp, Interim CEO, Rothamsted Research
Professor Dale Sanders FRS , Director, The John Innes Centre
Professor Sir David Baulcombe FRS, Plant Sciences Department, University of Cambridge
Professor Julie Fitzpatrick, Scientific Director, Moredun Research Institute
Professor Rob Edwards, Head of Natural and Environmental Sciences, Newcastle University
Dr Vicky Foster, Head of British Beet Research Organisation
Professor Neil Hall, Director of The Earlham Institute
Professor Nick Talbot FRS, Executive Director, The Sainsbury Laboratory, Norwich
Professor Iain Donnison, Head of IBERS, Aberystwyth University
Roger Vickers, Chief Executive, Processors & Growers Research Organisation
Professor Wayne Powell, Principal and Chief Executive, SRUC
Professor Giles Oldroyd FRS, Director, Crop Science Centre, Cambridge