



All-Party Parliamentary Group on Science and Technology in Agriculture

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APPG chair calls for urgent review of ‘illicit’ seed use by organic growers

The chair of an influential cross-party group at Westminster has written to Environment Secretary George Eustice demanding an urgent Government review into the practice of non-organic seed use by certified organic growers.

It follows revelations that organic growers taking part in oilseed rape trials in Scotland were illicitly marketing crops grown from 100% conventional seed as organic, receiving premiums in excess of £500/tonne yet in clear breach of organic rules requiring conventional seed to be sown as a mixture with organically grown seed.

Julian Sturdy MP, chair of the All-Party Parliamentary group on Science and Technology in Agriculture, described the revelations as a ‘kick in the teeth’ for conventional OSR growers struggling even to cover their production costs following the loss of neonic seed treatments and without access to effective alternatives.

Cambridgeshire arable farmer Martin Jenkins recently highlighted the organic sector’s double standards after a Soil Association report entitled [Organic Farming and Growing – does it stack up?](#) claimed to show how much more profitable organic farmers are than their conventional counterparts, with organic arable farmers receiving a net income of £690/ha compared to £288/ha for non-organic.

In an open letter to Ministers and MPs, Mr Jenkins highlighted the case of [organic OSR trials](#) in Aberdeenshire, in which growers used 100% non-organic hybrid seed yet still pocketed a premium of £520 per tonne over conventional for their ‘organic’ OSR.

Mr Jenkins pointed to a written answer last November from former Defra Minister Lord Gardiner in response to a [Parliamentary Question](#) regarding non-organic seed use on organic farms. This confirmed that while organic growers can seek an emergency derogation to use non-organic seed in situations of limited availability, such seed must be mixed with organically grown seed, with non-organic seeds making up the minimum proportion possible.

Lord Gardiner’s response also confirmed that crops grown from 100% non-organic seed cannot legally be marketed as ‘organic’, prompting Mr Jenkins to describe the Aberdeenshire trials as a ‘dubious con-trick’ and to ask how organic consumers would view the obscene profiteering taking place at their expense.

Mr Sturdy said: “For conventional oilseed rape growers struggling with pest-ravaged crops following the loss of neonic seed treatments, this flagrant breach not only of the law but also the spirit of organic farming principles must feel like a kick in the teeth. I have written to George Eustice calling for an urgent investigation into the practice of non-organic seed use by certified organic growers including a review of how compliance with the law is independently policed, monitored and enforced.”

ENDS

Notes to Editors

Read a copy of Martin Jenkins’ open letter to Ministers and MPs and Julian Sturdy MP’s letter to Defra Secretary Rt Hon George Eustice MP [here](#).

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.

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