



All-Party Parliamentary Group on  
Science and Technology in Agriculture

**To: Daniel Zeichner MP, Minister for Food Security and Rural Affairs, Defra**

By e-mail

6 January 2025

Dear Minister

We wrote to you in July 2024, with the support of more than 50 leading organisations and individuals across the scientific, food processing, farming, breeding, veterinary and input supply sectors, seeking confirmation that the newly-elected Labour administration would act quickly and decisively in bringing forward the secondary legislation needed to implement the Genetic Technology (Precision Breeding) Act 2023.

We very much appreciated your response at the time, which confirmed that innovation is key to supporting the Government's efforts to strengthen food security, enhance resilience and improve agricultural sustainability. We also welcomed your subsequent statement at the World Agri-Tech Innovation Summit in London at the end of September, providing confirmation that the Government will bring forward the necessary implementing regulations "as soon as Parliamentary time allows."

You also indicated that this legislation was needed to unlock precision breeding to boost Britain's food security, support nature's recovery and protect farmers from climate shocks.

We completely agree. But five months on from our original letter, we would be grateful if you could now provide confirmation of a firm timetable for introducing this legislation?

We note that other Governments around the world are pointing to England, alongside other nations such as Canada, Australia and Japan, as examples of countries pressing ahead with more enabling regulation of precision breeding technologies such as genome editing.

On 17 December 2024, for example, just 14 months after taking office, New Zealand's National-led coalition Government introduced the Gene Technology Bill, with the objective of enabling and unlocking the potential of new genetic technologies. Science Minister Judith Collins said: *"Our current regulations for genetically modified organisms are some of the most backward looking in the world. New Zealand has lagged behind other countries, such as Australia, Canada, and England, which have safely embraced these technologies for the benefit of their people and their economies."*

The reality, however, is that unlike the other countries mentioned, the Precision Breeding Act in England remains an empty shell until the necessary implementing rules are in place. Contrary to Minister Collins' statement, we are not yet embracing these technologies for the benefit of our people and our economies.

With continued delay, we believe the Government is at risk of sowing the seeds of doubt about its commitment to innovation among prospective investors and innovators, a number of whom are sitting tight, literally waiting for the precision breeding regulatory framework to be in place to bring forward exciting new PBO applications.

A further reason for seeking early and urgent implementation of the Precision Breeding Act lies in recent reports that the UK Government may be preparing to open fresh trade negotiations with the European Union, including a new Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) agreement covering food and agriculture.

Worryingly, media reports have already indicated that this would mean revoking the Precision Breeding Act.

These reports appear to be based on leaked documents from the EU indicating that the bloc's terms for such a deal would require the UK to abide by rulings from the European Court of Justice on matters of EU law, with full alignment to the Union *acquis* and no scope for a deal "based on the equivalence of legislation".

Clearly, we do not know whether this leaked information is well-founded or not, and we would not expect Ministers to comment on such reports.

However, it does underline the importance of taking action now to demonstrate the Government's strong commitment to innovation, and to taking the lead on the international stage – in your words, putting our agriculture sector "at the forefront of innovation across the world".

Failure to implement the Precision Breeding Act at the earliest possible opportunity would represent a serious backwards step for food security, climate action and more sustainable agriculture. The Precision Breeding Act is progressive, coherent and evidence-based. There can be no certainty at all that the EU will end up with similar arrangements, over what timescale, or indeed that political agreement on their proposed NGT regulations would be reached at all. Similarly, concluding a trade deal and SPS agreement with the EU could take many years.

In relation to the use of precision breeding in farmed animals, which is covered under the Precision Breeding Act, the EU is even further behind. Waiting for the EU to develop its own regulatory approach would be a major setback for prospects to use genome editing to tackle virulent livestock diseases such as bird flu in poultry, porcine reproductive and respiratory syndrome (PRRS) and African Swine Fever in pigs, bovine TB and viral diarrhoea in cattle, and sea lice infestation in farmed salmon.

British science is at the forefront of this research.

Getting our rules in place now will enable investment to flow and innovation to take place. It will allow the first precision bred products to be commercialised, and for the market to demonstrate that it can respond effectively to divergent regulatory requirements in relation to PBOs, including on an intra-UK basis.

Most importantly, it will unlock the promise of these critical technologies in accelerating access to the agricultural innovation needed to make our farming systems more resilient, to produce more from less, to leave more room for nature, and to reduce the climate and environmental footprint of our food.

We look forward to receiving your prompt confirmation of the Government's timetable for bringing the PB Act implementing rules forward.

With kind regards

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Plant scientist

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Livestock scientist



### **Signatories**

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