



All-Party Parliamentary Group on Science and Technology in Agriculture

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Prime Minister urged to sign Britain up to new global coalition for agricultural productivity growth

Amid reports that Boris Johnson is set for on-to-one talks with President Joe Biden in Washington next week to discuss joint action on climate change, a prominent farming MP has written to the Prime Minister urging him to include food and agriculture on the agenda, and in particular to sign the UK up to the new US-led Global Coalition for Agricultural Productivity Growth.

In the letter, Julian Sturdy MP, chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Science and Technology in Agriculture, said the close relationship between the UK and the US was of critical importance to securing a successful outcome to the forthcoming COP26 climate summit in Glasgow, and nowhere was this more crucial than in relation to food and agriculture, and the future policies which will support more sustainable approaches to feeding a hungry, warming planet.

Earlier this week, US Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack called on other nations to join the US in a new Global Coalition for Agricultural Productivity Growth, directly challenging the notion that more sustainable equals less productive by demonstrating that farmers can adopt environmentally friendly and climate-smart farming practices without sacrificing productivity.

Secretary Vilsack said: “We think it’s possible and appropriate for science and innovation to play a significant role in helping farmers be more productive and more sustainable,” and that “biotechnology, gene editing, research and development, new precision agriculture are all strategies and techniques and technologies that can be used.”

Last week, Mr Sturdy’s All-Party Group hosted a meeting with high-level experts in crop science, agricultural economics, rural policy and conservation science, which highlighted the urgent need to optimise productivity on existing farmland, using the latest scientific knowledge and technological innovation, so reducing pressure on unfarmed habitats and environments – here and elsewhere - and minimising agriculture’s external impacts and greenhouse gas emissions per unit of food produced.

The meeting also highlighted genuine concerns that the UK’s policy focus on ‘sustainable intensification’ in agriculture – securing the optimum balance between food production, resource use and environmental protection - has been shelved in favour of a transition to support for less productive farming systems, and that the

current development of future farm support policies is over-reliant on voluntary and campaigning NGOs.

“It makes no sense to encourage lower yielding systems of agricultural production here and simply export our food system impacts when the UK is blessed with good soils, a temperate climate, a highly professional and well-equipped farming sector and world-leading research institutes. With the UN FAO Food Prices Index currently nudging levels similar to the food price spikes of 2008 that prompted food riots in 30 countries, it is not a question of ‘if’ there will be another global food security crisis, but ‘when’,” said Mr Sturdy.

“We warmly welcome Lord Frost’s announcement earlier this week that Ministers will shortly announce plans to reform the regulations governing the use of gene editing in agriculture. Members of our Group were instrumental in calling on the Government to set-aside the EU’s regressive and unscientific approach to regulation in this area, which has stifled innovation and driven investment elsewhere. However, a more enabling approach to regulation will only realise the potential opportunities in terms of more sustainable agriculture and food production if it is matched by pro-innovation policies which encourage and support the adoption of such technologies at farm-level.”

“That’s why I have written to the Prime Minister in advance of his discussions with President Biden, urging him to include the Global Coalition for Agricultural Productivity Growth in the UK’s collaborative work programmes with the United States.”

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Notes to Editors

A copy of the letter from Julian Sturdy MP to the Prime Minister is available [here](#).

Read 16 September news release *APPG chair calls for renewed policy focus on sustainable intensification in agriculture* [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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