



All-Party Parliamentary Group on Science and Technology in Agriculture

16 June 2021

APPG welcomes TIGRR recommendations on gene editing and agri-metrics

The chair of an influential cross-party grouping of MPs and Lords has welcomed high-level calls for the UK to use its Brexit freedoms to promote the development and commercial uptake of gene edited crops, and to develop a comprehensive system of farm to fork sustainability metrics to help deliver ‘more from less’ in terms of sustainable, efficient agriculture.

The proposals were among 120 recommendations contained in a report issued today by the Prime Minister’s Task Force on Innovation Growth and Regulatory Reform (TIGRR), which argued that Brexit offered a ‘one-off opportunity’ to develop new domestic regulations designed to boost productivity, encourage competition and stimulate innovation.

Julian Sturdy MP, chair of the APPG on Science and Technology in Agriculture, said the report represented a major step forward in identifying the regulatory reforms needed to liberate the UK’s strengths in agricultural science and innovation.

“In March, the All-Party Group hosted a brainstorming session on ideas for regulatory reform with George Freeman MP, who led on the life sciences, agri-tech and cleantech aspects of the Task Force’s work. It is encouraging that so many of the proposals presented at that meeting have been highlighted in the final report to the Prime Minister.”

“But we are particularly pleased that the issues of gene editing and sustainability metrics feature so prominently. These are policy areas on which this Group has been particularly active, because we believe they will be central to unleashing our capacity for innovation to support productive, sustainable and climate-resilient agriculture.”

On gene editing, the TIGRR report’s Headline Recommendation 14 states that ‘the UK Government should actively support research into and commercial adoption by UK farmers and growers of gene edited crops, particularly those which help the transition away from agrochemicals to naturally occurring biological resilience.’

The report warns that restrictive EU rules on genetic technologies are locking Britain’s farmers and world class agri-science sector out of major opportunities to increase crops yields, reduce the environmental impact of farming, help tackle climate change and develop a new range of bio-energy and nutritionally enhanced crops. It calls for rapid regulatory reform to ensure gene edited crops which could have been produced through traditional breeding methods are regulated as any other new variety.

On the need for a comprehensive system of sustainability metrics for food and agriculture, the report highlights a growing recognition that hi-tech, productive farming can be environmentally sustainable, by helping farmers produce 'more with less'. Building on the data and metrics work initiated as part of the UK Agri-Tech Strategy, it calls for this work to be accelerated to implement the data sharing provisions in the Agriculture Act 2020, and to develop a comprehensive system of environmental metrics for sustainable agriculture, incorporating the environmental impacts of production systems from field to fork, to support clearer food labelling.

Commenting, Mr Sturdy said:

“As a Group we have long advocated the need to embed data science and sustainability metrics at the heart of a policy agenda focused on securing the optimum balance between food production, resource use and environmental impact.”

“We believe access to metrics capable of objectively and consistently monitoring that balance will be essential to set targets and measure progress for sustainable efficient production, to develop coherent R&D programmes, to understand and disseminate advice on best practice throughout the industry, and to provide meaningful information to consumers relating to the resource use, environmental impacts and climate change implications of each unit of food produced, whether a litre of milk or a kg of potatoes.”

“We strongly welcome this recommendation and will do everything we can to support its rapid and effective implementation.”

ENDS

Notes to Editors

The report from the Prime Minister's Task Force on Innovation Growth and Regulatory Reform is available online [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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