



NEWS RELEASE

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APPG chair calls for major ag policy reset to help UK farmers produce ‘more from less’

UK agriculture policy needs a ‘180-degree, tyre-screeching reset’ to unlock the world-leading science and innovation taking place at Britain’s research institutes and universities, and to help our farmers produce ‘more from less’ against a backdrop of increasing global uncertainty and volatility.

That was the key message delivered by former science minister George Freeman MP, chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Science and Technology in Agriculture, as he announced next steps to take forward the Group’s ambitious **30:50:50 Innovation Agenda for UK Agriculture**.

Speaking at Agri-TechE’s ‘Challenge Convention’ event at Niab earlier this week, Mr Freeman reminded a packed audience of scientific and industry leaders that the context for this mission, originally set out in Sir John Beddington’s Foresight report on Global Food Security almost 15 years ago, was now even more urgent with the impact of climate change, war in Ukraine and ongoing geopolitical instability. He warned of mass migration, civil unrest, malnutrition and famine if the world does not step up to the urgent challenge of feeding a world population set to exceed 10 billion people by 2050, on the same amount of land, and using half as much water and energy.

“When we are rapidly accelerating into a war-time economy, needing to find extra billions to fund defence commitments and peace-keeping efforts in Ukraine, this is a massive reset moment, whether we wanted it or not,” he said. “So, I really welcome the fact that the Labour Government has made clear that food security is national security.”

“But when it comes to agriculture, the rest of the world is moving quicker than us, and our slow response is all the more noticeable. UK wheat yields are continuing to flat-line, other countries’ agricultural productivity growth is outpacing ours, and our import reliance in key sectors such as veg, fruit and oils is at record highs. So, the indicators are going the wrong way, not the right way.”

Mr Freeman noted that even the EU has cancelled its production-limiting Green Deal commitments, with a new **Vision for Agriculture and Food** recently launched to

safeguard and strengthen the bloc's productive capacity, underlining the heightened risks of Europe taking its food security and food sovereignty for granted.

He also pointed to the United States, which has set out its own high-level Agricultural Innovation Agenda, with a goal to increase food production by 40% by 2050, while halving US agriculture's environmental footprint.

The UK must adopt a similar, long-term objective to increase food production sustainably, he said, warning that the orthodoxy being pursued by Defra across successive Governments, for example of de-intensifying agricultural production and re-wilding productive farmland, is plain wrong and out of kilter with these global ambitions.

“This is absolute madness, and it is up to us, the political class, the elected politicians, to set a new direction that is fit for the world we live in, and that is capable of harnessing and exploiting the genius of UK farmers and our agri-innovation capabilities. This is not about criticising individual officials at Defra, but about recognising that the structure we have created, of very remote, top-down Whitehall policymaking, is increasingly disconnected from the reality on the ground,” said Mr Freeman.

“If we really are serious about food security, about food affordability, about sustainability, and about establishing the UK as a hub of innovation and regulatory leadership, investment and global impact, all of which are key to the Government's growth mission, then there is no sector more important than British agriculture,” he said.

Mr Freeman explained that this was why the All-Party Group was leading the way in calling for a policy reset to increase the UK's domestic food self-sufficiency from 60% to 75% over the next 25 years. This will mean increasing food production by 30% by 2050 while reducing farming's environmental footprint by 50% per unit of output, in terms of greenhouse gas emissions, land use, water use and soil health. The 30:50:50 vision.

Mr Freeman emphasised that the 30:50:50 vision is the start of an ongoing conversation, and he announced the All-Party Group's planned next steps to take it forward via three separate roundtable meetings focused on the three steps set out in the [vision document](#):

- the 30:50:50 target for sustainable efficient production (SEP) and the indicators it is based on;
- establishing a mechanism for the collection and integration of farm data to provide a single SEP Index metric for consumers, policymakers and investors;
- ensuring policy is joined up to support the 30:50:50 goal across the three pillars of farming and land use, regulation of innovations, and R&D.

“The output from these three roundtables will inform the policy actions needed to deliver on the 30:50:50 Innovation Agenda for UK Agriculture,” said Mr Freeman. “Our

recommendations will be unveiled and presented to Ministers at an APPG Agri-Science Summit in the summer.

“We actively encourage input from across the sector to inform and support this process, which we hope will play a key role in building cross-party and cross-industry understanding and consensus around the urgency of these issues, and the way forward,” he said.

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Notes

The APPG’s [30:50:50 vision document](#) was launched at the [Agri-Science Week in Parliament](#) event in January.

It sets out three clear steps to deliver on the 30:50:50 objective.

Step one

Set clear, measurable objectives for Sustainable Efficient Production, or SEP.

Mirroring the US Agriculture Innovation Agenda, the APPG believes a 30% increase in domestic food production can be delivered by 2050 while reducing farming’s environmental footprint by 50% per unit of output, in terms of greenhouse gas emissions, land use, water use and soil health.

The 30:50:50 agenda.

Step two

Develop a consistent, evidence-based approach to the collection and integration of farm-level data to provide a single metric for consumers, policy-makers and investors - the SEP Index.

The All-Party Group has long-advocated the need to embed data science and sustainability metrics at the heart of a more evidence-based policy agenda, with a laser focus on securing the optimum balance between food production, resource use and environmental impact.

To deliver the SEP Index in practice, the APPG recommends the establishment of a new **National Agri-Data Institute**, funded by and reporting to Defra, to create a centralised system for industry-wide sharing, collation and analysis of the vast silos of agricultural data – on-farm and in research institutes – which are not currently being properly integrated or exploited.

Step three

Ensure that the policy landscape is joined up and focused on the right priorities to deliver on the 30:50:50 agenda.

The weight of scientific evidence indicates, for example, that it will require a shift away from ‘land-sharing’ farm policies to more of a ‘land-sparing’ approach, with an emphasis on high-yield farming on a smaller land area to free up more space for intact nature and carbon sequestration. It will also mean policy reform in terms of land use, regulation of new

agricultural technologies, and a re-organisation of our fragmented R&D landscape to focus on the delivery of innovation and translation into practice.

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.

For further information contact:

Daniel Pearsall, Group Co-ordinator, APPG Science & Technology in Agriculture

E-mail: press@appg-agscience.org.uk

Tel: 07770 875455

www.appg-agscience.org.uk