



23 May 2013

BSPB elects new chairman

Dr Richard Summers, cereal breeding and research lead at RAGT Seeds, has been elected chairman of the British Society of Plant Breeders (BSPB) for a period of three years. He takes over from Nigel Moore, director of business administration at KWS, who has chaired BSPB since 2010.

Speaking at BSPB's Annual General Meeting earlier this week, Dr Summers thanked Nigel Moore on behalf of BSPB members for his contribution as chairman, particularly in raising the profile of the plant breeding industry, forging effective working partnerships with other sectors of the industry, and strengthening UK plant breeders' engagement and influence at a European level.

"Plant breeders have a pivotal role to play in addressing the challenges of global food security, climate change and sustainable development," said Dr Summers. "The signals now coming out of government, of the need to reinvigorate a fractured UK agricultural R&D pipeline, to reverse the chronic declines in applied and translational research, and to restore the position of modern agriculture as a productive, hi-tech sector of the economy, are extremely positive for our sector.

"Under Nigel's chairmanship, BSPB has been instrumental in highlighting the need to translate the UK's world-class plant science expertise into adapted germplasm, traits and breeding tools relevant to the needs of commercial plant breeders. Given the urgent demands on agriculture to produce more from less, there is increased recognition that our industry provides the only route to market for crop genetic innovation, through improved, high-performing varieties.

"The ongoing challenge for BSPB is to ensure the renewed significance attached to agricultural science and innovation translates into tangible opportunities to establish the UK as a major international centre of excellence for commercial plant breeding, supported by a strong framework of IP protection and proportionate, cost-effective regulation," he said.



DR RICHARD SUMMERS - CEREAL BREEDING AND RESEARCH CO-ORDINATOR, RAGT

Richard leads cereal breeding and research at RAGT. He is responsible for 4 winter wheat breeding programmes (in UK, France, Germany and the Czech Republic), durum wheat, triticale, barley and associated research groups in genotyping, analytics, pathology and breeding support. Additionally he has responsibility for cereal trialling in non-core geographies in Europe and elsewhere in the world.

After a PhD in genetics at Sheffield University, Richard began his career at the Plant Breeding Institute (PBI) in 1984, working on disease resistance in wheat. After the sale of PBI to Unilever he worked as a winter wheat breeder in the UK and France until 1999 (producing over 35 commercially listed varieties with the breeding team). Under Monsanto ownership, 1998-2004, Richard had technical responsibility for the company's wheat breeding activities in Europe and South Africa. After the sale of the European wheat breeding programmes to RAGT in 2004, Richard took on his present role.

In addition to his BSPB role, Richard is a NIAB board member and a member of the John Innes Centre Science Impact Advisory Board.

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