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## **Agri-Tech Strategy: Plant breeders welcome renewed focus on translational research**

The British Society of Plant Breeders (BSPB) has welcomed the UK Agri-Tech Strategy, published today, as a clear recognition by Government of the need to boost the production efficiency of UK agriculture, to forge stronger links between the science base and industry, and to accelerate the transfer of research into practical on-farm application.

BSPB hailed the Strategy's emphasis on productive, hi-tech farming and the allocation of new funding streams to support translational research as a positive signal that agriculture is once again viewed as a key strategic sector of the UK economy.

Having set out a broad vision and policy framework to unlock the potential of the UK agri-food sector, implementation of the Strategy must now recognise the importance of investment in a functioning crop improvement pipeline, said BSPB chairman Dr Richard Summers.

"Today's publication of the Agri-Tech Strategy, as part of the Government's wider Industrial Strategy to promote economic growth and inward investment, is in itself symbolic of a resurgent interest in modern, science-based agriculture."

"When setting priorities for the Strategy's implementation, Ministers and members of the Agri-Tech Leadership Council must recognise that while renewed investment in areas such as precision farming, remote sensing and hi-tech robotics is important, it cannot substitute for the need to ensure that advances in basic plant science can be readily translated into market-ready traits, germplasm and breeding tools," said Dr Summers.

"Access to improved crop varieties – delivered to market by the commercial plant breeding and seeds sector - is the foundation for successful, productive agriculture. Over the past 30 years more than 90% of the yield gains in our major crops is due to plant breeding innovation."

"But in recent years BSPB has moved to highlight concerns over the widening gap between public sector research and its relevance or accessibility to commercial plant breeders."

"The Agri-Tech Strategy offers a major opportunity to bridge this gap. Improved collaboration between public and private sector and increased investment in translational research can help plant breeders deliver the step-change improvements in yield, climate resilience, pest and disease resistance needed to meet future food security and sustainable development goals."

Dr Summers also welcomed the establishment of a new Centre for Agricultural Informatics and Sustainability Metrics as a key opportunity for the UK to take the lead in this rapidly advancing field:

“Through Foresight, the UK led the way in framing the concept of ‘sustainable intensification’ in response to the emerging global challenges of population growth, climate change and declining natural resources.”

“Less clear is precisely what this means in practice for different product sectors and farming systems, how to measure and benchmark current performance and, critically, how to drive improvements in sustainable efficient production over time.”

“Farming businesses generate large amounts of data relating to input use, productivity and farm management systems, but no system currently exists for industry-wide sharing, collation or analysis of such data.”

“The creation of a dedicated Centre for Agricultural Informatics could provide a focal point to collect, integrate and exploit these vast silos of farm-level data to support best practice improvements in the sustainable efficiency of on-farm production,” said Dr Summers.

**ENDS**

### **Notes to Editors**

The British Society of Plant Breeders (BSPB) is the representative body for the UK plant breeding industry. Acting on members’ behalf, BSPB licenses, collects and distributes certified seed royalties and farm-saved seed payments on agricultural and horticultural crops. The Society represents members’ interests on technical, regulatory and intellectual property matters, and works to promote continued innovation and investment in UK plant breeding.

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