

NEWS RELEASE

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Foresight report highlights key role for plant breeding in food security challenge

The British Society of Plant Breeders (BSPB) has welcomed this week's publication of the *Global Food and Farming Futures* Foresight report, not only in raising the profile and urgency of the global food security challenge, but also in highlighting the importance of agricultural science and technology in delivering the 'sustainable intensification' required to feed a growing population in the face of climate change and declining land, water and energy resources.

A central role is envisaged for advances in plant breeding. Importantly, the Foresight report singles out the potential to apply both new and existing knowledge and technology to increase crop yields. It also calls for targeted investment in research to keep pace with the emergence of new and more virulent pests and diseases, and to develop new varieties of crops that are resistant to increased drought, flooding and salinity arising from climate change.

The report also highlights the possible longer-term contribution of other more revolutionary breeding advances, such as the development of perennial grain crops, the introduction of nitrogen fixation into non-legume crops, and re-engineering the photosynthetic pathways of different plants.

"The Foresight study represents the most comprehensive and authoritative analysis to date of the pressures building up on the global food supply system, from rapid population growth and urbanisation to climate change, land degradation and poverty. Plant breeders will be at the forefront of delivering the innovation required for the sustainable intensification of agriculture called for in the report. The challenge now is to turn its high-level recommendations into practical action," said Nigel Moore, BSPB Chairman.

"The report calls for a joined-up approach across a range of policy areas, but the simple fact remains that the most realistic prospect of delivering sustainable food security is through increased crop productivity per hectare on land that is already farmed.

"That will require clear, crop-specific targets for increases in productive yield and resource use efficiency – to guide the most effective allocation of limited R&D resources and expenditure. It will mean developing more coherent public sector research strategies to ensure our rapidly advancing knowledge-base in plant genetics feeds through to practical innovation at the farm level and rapid uptake of new varieties by producers. It will also require a culture shift among policy-makers and regulators, particularly at an EU level, to create a stimulating and enabling regulatory environment for crop science and plant breeding innovation.

"Above all, we would strongly endorse the urgency for action signalled throughout the report. In plant breeding, a parental cross made today takes at least seven years to become a commercial variety. The timescales involved are such that we need to act now to deliver on the targets set out," concluded Mr Moore.

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