

BSPB policy asks on EU reset, Precision Breeding, and Agricultural Policy

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October 2025



The British Society of Plant Breeders (BSPB) is the voice of the world-leading UK plant breeding sector, with over 80 members covering every part of the agricultural, horticultural, and amenity supply chains. With UK agricultural policy going through some of the biggest changes for decades, more is being demanded from seed that underpins a £130+ billion agri-food supply chain.

We are in a global agri-food landscape with a changing climate and pressure to 'grow more with less'. Across the UK, Government and policymakers want to boost food security and sustainability, and plant breeding innovation will continue to be the main source of delivering this.

It is more important than ever that we have the right policy environment to enable plant breeders to invest and deliver the innovation we need to help farmers and growers be profitable and governments meet their sustainability, environmental, and food security goals.

The BSPBs main policy asks are:

EU Reset – opportunities for the sector, if done carefully

The EU-UK Reset represents a real opportunity for UK plant breeding, but it must be done right and carefully. The last few years have been challenging for UK plant breeders who have faced expensive and damaging trade barriers, delays, and import/export processes which have not worked well.

The UK and EU aim of a common sanitary and phytosanitary area should mean most of these trade barriers are removed, which would benefit UK and EU plant breeding, investment, and grower access to innovation. However, the UK will also become more of a 'rule taker' so it will be crucial for the UK Government to ensure dynamic alignment includes as much mutual recognition of UK National Listing, Plant Breeders Rights, and the wider structures and processes where there are differences for example in relation to precision breeding.

A good reset will help 'level the playing field', but the EU Common Agricultural Policy still provides direct support and greater certainty to plan than UK agricultural policy. However, the playing field will not be level if trade barriers are removed, but other domestic costs or regulations remain and impose a greater burden on UK plant breeders and processes than are faced by those in the EU. To manage this, there should at least be a genuine mutual recognition between the UK and EU processes and systems which govern plant breeding.

and seed production, and one which allows for minor exemptions and differences. The UK Government may have to push hard for this, but it would be in the interests of both sides to ensure the risks of dynamic alignment are not all imposed on UK breeders.

The sector will also need Government to listen to the plant breeding sector more than ever as we move to being a country which can only 'influence' rather than directly shape the policies affecting the sector. As a member of Euroseeds, the BSPB already works closely with their excellent team on pan-European policy and will continue to do so.

The UK Government must work with the EU to remove as many of the trade, sanitary, and phytosanitary barriers facing plant breeders as possible, whilst also seeing to ensure a genuinely level playing field with mutual recognition of the wider systems, processes, and regulation of plant breeding.

Precision Breeding – realising the potential

The UK has made great progress in establishing a primary and secondary legislative basis for precision breeding in England. However, breeders still need the Food Standards Agency marketing authorisation process to be one which genuinely enables breeders to use precision breeding, and a Plant Variety Strategy for precision breeding before it becomes reality.

The BSPB is concerned the complexities of the UK's internal market and EU Reset have caused further delays to the necessary measures being put in place ready for the expected date when precision breeding should become a reality in November 2025.

The message to policymakers is clear, precision breeding is a real opportunity for England to drive innovation, growth, and sustainability in agriculture, the environment and food supply chains. It would represent a damaging and unnecessary blow to see delays and poor regulation endanger this opportunity at such a late stage. The BSPB believe that waiting to see if the EU implements NGT's will only delay access to the benefits of the technology, and risks seeing investment which could come to the UK go elsewhere.

Europe as a whole will benefit from access to the technology being established in European conditions like those in England.

The Precision Breeding Act must be fully implemented in an enabling and accessible way. Too much complication, cost, or further delays will only mean the UK misses out on the potential to be a leader in European precision breeding and other reap the innovation and economic benefit.

UK agricultural policy which values plant breeding and seed

UK agricultural policy has undergone one of its most profound periods of change over the last decade. It has also been one of the most challenging times for breeders and farmers as they try to adapt and deal with some of the greatest uncertainty for generations.

The approach has also often been ‘top down’ with little consideration about the role of plant breeding and seed in the wider policy landscape. The uncertainty and changes of policy in areas like the Sustainable Farming Incentive make the long-term planning the breeding sector requires very difficult.

Many of the goals of the UK Governments are well intentioned – reducing the impact of producing our food, improving food security, boosting economic growth, helping farmers become more profitable – or farmers might say making them profitable at all! To achieve these, innovation and investment in plant breeding will be fundamental, just as it has been throughout the last century in allowing us to feed a population which has grown from 38 million in 1945 to 70 million today.

Breeders need regulation which adapts to the modern nature and demands of supply chains and uses the latest technology to reduce the cost and burden of accessing markets.

Longer-term policy certainty is also required for investment and innovation – breeding is expensive and can take 10 to 15 years for an idea to make it to commercial reality. Crop rotations have been put under pressure as the incentive to grow a wider range of crops has come under unintentional policy pressure from Government. Farmers need that same longer-term certainty to take a risk and commit to growing a wider range of crops.



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