

# Plant Breeding Matters

Information from the British Society of Plant Breeders

SUMMER /  
 AUTUMN 2023

I am sad to say that this will be my last foreword for Plant Breeding Matters, after three lovely and rewarding years at BSPB I am moving on to pastures new. Although I will no longer be at BSPB, I am staying in the seed industry, so my passion for genetics and seed innovation will continue!

I would like to say a massive thank you to the team at BSPB and our members for all your support, it is clear the society is a valued part of our industry and I know the team will continue to promote what we do.

There is plenty for our industry to be excited about and plenty of work to do. The ongoing success of the PBO legislation changes are a huge step forward and will enable us to work with Defra and the FSA to ensure a scientifically based regulatory system that can help bring new varieties, bred with precision techniques, to the market.

Defra PVS is also working on developing a 5 year strategy which BSPB looks forward to supporting and will also be looking at the Plant Reproductive Material legislation. This is critical to enable improved new varieties to enter our market, and will also ensure continued high investment by UK plant breeders.

BSPB is delighted to announce that Steph Spiers will take on the new role of Head of Business Operations, Steph's knowledge of the business and determination for

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**Sam Brooke / BSPB Chief Executive**


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## SAM BROOKE / BSPB CHIEF EXECUTIVE

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continuous improvement are a huge asset to the Society, so please reach out to Steph.

I hope you enjoy the updates and publications BSPB produce and we always value your input. If there is other content you would like to see, please get in touch.

Please save the date for our AGM which takes place from **10.00 on Friday 13th October at The Brewery, 52 Chiswell Street, London, EC1Y 4SA.**

## MAIZE UPDATE

Until the end of 2023, seeds treated with PPPs (Plant Protection Products) that are not authorised for that use in Great Britain, but are authorised in an EU member state, are permitted to be imported, marketed and used in Great Britain, under Article 49(1) of Regulation (EC)1107/2009. From 1 January 2024 this will change, with only British approved seed treated with a PPP permitted for use in Great Britain.

Mark Spencer has backed emergency applications and has said Defra will lobby for an extension to the import of treated seed into the UK from the EU. However, no extension date has been confirmed and many crops, especially maize, are at risk.

There are currently no seed treatments licenced for application to maize in the UK and this issue also affects a number of vegetable crops and a small number of cereals.

Maize is grown on 220,000 hectares in the UK. John Morgan from the Maize Growers Association explains:

“Maize is a vital crop, both as a highly nutritious animal feed and the highest energy yield feedstock for anaerobic digestion. Currently, all maize seeds sown in the UK are produced in Europe, as we do not have the climatic conditions to grow the seed crops.

We are especially concerned with the lack of a suitable bird repellent as feeding birds such as Corvids can result in the total loss of the maize crop. This was detailed in a recent report from NIAB where Corvids were able to identify which maize plots were untreated and moved down the rows, learning the distance between seeds and taking almost all of them.”



■ John Morgan

Nearly 60% of farmers responding to a survey carried out by NIAB to understand the risks around this issue said that they would grow less maize in the absence of seed treatments, with nearly 20% potentially ceasing to grow the crop completely.

“It is imperative that we act to extend the use of maize seed for at least another growing season in order to put legislation in place that enables European seed to be accepted for use in the UK,” concluded John.

### Key dates to note:

**30 June 2023** – sales of parallel products will end

**30 June 2024** – final use date for parallel products

**1 January 2024** – only seed treated with a PPP authorised in GB will be permitted for use

## SEED TREATMENT FORUM

### Update from Rae Cook – Elsoms

Rae Cook attended 'Access to seed treatments', a round table discussion in which Mark Spencer and representatives from NFU, HCP, AIC and the Maize Growers Association came together to discuss the seed treatment authorisation system and a national action plan for sustainable farming.

It was made clear that the authorisation system was in 'long term' review, but attendees were keen to establish what short term measures could be made to help breeders and growers. The outcome was that Mark Spencer pledged his support and felt positive that an extension could be secured to push the seed treatment policy changes beyond the current January 2024 deadline. However, it was also suggested that emergency authorisations (EAs) for products that were planned for use in 2024 were still to be pursued.

The Maize Growers Association has submitted EAs for forage maize seed treatments, namely for Korit 420 FS, Redigo M and Force ST to CRD/HSE for evaluation. HCP has also submitted an application for an EA for Redigo M for sweetcorn, along with other applications for a range of vegetable crops.



■ Rae Cook

Mark Spencer wrote to those in attendance suggesting that the outlook was positive and that it was his "firm intention to have a solution in place for the next growing season".

The group has since replied asking for his continued support to fast track EAs so that 2024-treated seed supplies can be ordered in time for delivery to avoid any issues with maize growing for both livestock and biogas industries for the coming season.

## NATIONAL LIST TRIALS UPDATE – LOUISE EVEREST

The BSPB has managed trials for over 18 years, incrementally adding more crops, with an influx since Brexit. A move toward derogating certain crops such as hemp have been encouraged so that, in exceptional circumstances, this may allow a temporary derogation to market seed below minimum standards.

Hemp varieties vary significantly, with some being used for fibre and other harvested for TCH content. The use may influence whether a variety will pass National List requirements and this where derogating a variety may help to

push it through. An example would be high TCH hemp for use in pharmaceuticals be derogated to be passed.

The main trials for combinable crops are progressing well, with additional tests for barley being used to offer additional insight for brewing, malting and distilling varieties. The number of tests also reflects applicants desire to see the varieties being identified as better for certain applications such as bread or biscuits.

With more pressure on breeders to produce varieties that are more sustainable with

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greater resistance to climatic, pest and disease pressures, the trials are evaluating different soil types to see where improvements can be made to reduce the reliance on inputs.

The Procedures Development Group (PDG) is also continuing its efforts to evaluate different procedures to establish which are fit for purpose to enable greater flexibility and allow more trials to continue. This is best highlighted by the continued efforts to gather data on the effect of cabbage stem flea beetle (CSFB) to OSR. Whilst CSFB has been an accepted problem for years, the PDG has set out a scoring system that will enable varieties to be marketed based on performance. It is hoped that trial data, and the scores given, will help to market OSR varieties to increase uptake from growers.



■ Louise Everest

## BSPB HOLDS VARIETY REGISTRATION PRESS CONFERENCE

On August 14th we held an online forum for journalists to understand more about UK variety registration. This focussed on our tried, tested and safe regulatory system we have for new varieties in the UK.

BSPB, working in association with AHDB, UKFM, AIC and NFU, explained to journalists how the comprehensive variety testing system we have in the UK delivers continuous improvement and resilient new varieties well adapted to our growing conditions.

"It is vital that we work with media partners to explain the importance of our member's work. Forums like this provide us, and the plant breeding industry, with a chance to explain how important processes like variety registration are to UK growers," said Sam Brooke.

Speakers included Paul Gosling (AHDB), Joe Brennan (UKFM), Rose Riby (AIC) and Luke Cox (NFU) who joined Sam, Louise Everest, and Steph Spiers from the BSPB to provide a comprehensive overview of how varieties are registered and why a safe regulatory system is beneficial to UK farmers and growers.

"We are grateful to all who contributed and attended this event, and I am sure that we will continue to work with the press in this way to help their readers understand how our industry is contributing to farming sustainability and productivity," said Sam.

### BRITISH SOCIETY OF PLANT BREEDERS LTD

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