

Promoting Seed Innovation

Newsletter from the British Society of Plant Breeders



**BRITISH SOCIETY OF
PLANT BREEDERS LTD**

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THE SEED SECTOR GATHERS IN EDINBURGH AT A CRUCIAL TIME FOR AGRICULTURE AND UK-EU RELATIONS

Once a year, people from across the world who are involved in the seed sector and agriculture gather in a city in Europe for the Euroseeds Congress, and this year we were delighted to be in Scotland for the event which had around 1200 attendees. It comes at a time when the UK's relationship with the EU is about to be 'reset' and many areas of agricultural policy remain uncertain. Several sessions and conference discussions inevitably focussed on the potential implications of the 'EU Reset' on the UK plant breeding and seed sector, and the main messages to come from the event were clear.

The UK Government made a manifesto commitment to reset the relationship with the EU during the election in 2024, and the EU has now published its own negotiating mandate for doing so. Most of the coverage has focussed on what it means for improving trade, and both sides are clear they would like to see the removal of most of the barriers to the trade which have been created over the last five years. Those barriers have been especially damaging and counterproductive for plant breeders, because so much seed is moved between countries in international breeding programmes and for multiplication work.

There are few who would argue that removing the trade barriers for the movement of seed would be a bad thing because those barriers have added cost and caused delays to some seed in the UK – especially for crops where we don't have the climate or scale to produce the seed here.

However, the agreement will go beyond the UK 'dynamically aligning' with the EU on trade.



It hardly needs to be said, but 2024-5 has been another difficult growing year, with exceptionally low levels of rain for much of the UK – some parts having received just 6 inches for the year to the end of August. At the time of writing, the early autumn had been more benign than the last few years, and many winter crops have got off to a good start, let's hope that continues. In this newsletter we'll look at some of the key issues facing plant breeding and the seed sector at the moment – with an update on precision breeding, the Euroseeds Congress in Edinburgh and EU Reset.

 **Anthony Hopkins**
BSPB Chairman

An agreement is likely to cover alignment in wider policy areas such as marketing, labelling, consumer protection laws, and plant protection for many agricultural products. Here the BSPB is making the case for the UK Government to press for as much mutual recognition as possible – so the EU recognises some processes and ways of doing things here – as widely as is compatible with dynamic alignment.

Done carefully, UK-EU Reset should encourage innovation and resilience in the UK. One example of that could be the UK regaining access to EU varieties of seeds without the need for them to go through the duplication of separate, costly, and lengthy ‘variety listing’ in the UK – this was the case and worked well for many years.

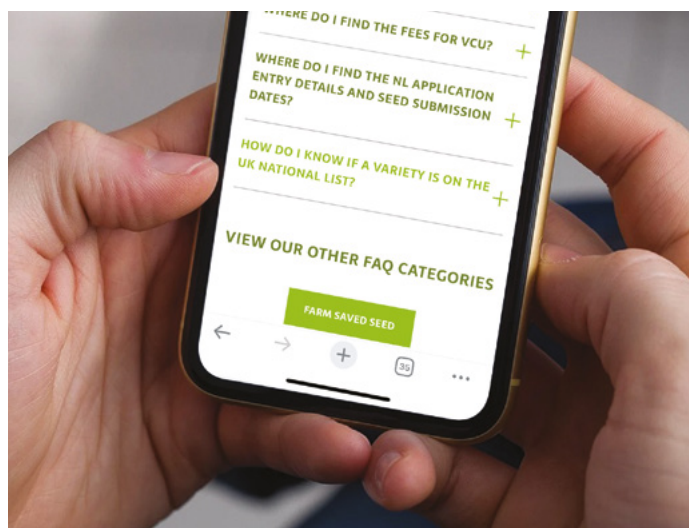


■ Euroseeds panel session on UK-EU relations with representatives of the EU Commission, Defra, and BSPB discussing the issues for UK breeders & farmers

The UK Government should also be negotiating with the EU over the coming months to argue for varieties being listed in the UK to be recognised by the EU as well to prevent us being disadvantaged. The same is true across a wide range of policy areas, and there will be plenty of work to do in the coming months to make sure both sides get this right.

One part of the equation which is often overlooked is how creating a more ‘level playing field’ between the UK and EU via a reset or sanitary and phytosanitary agreement is not all the UK Government should be doing. There are many differences which the agreement will not address – for example, the EU still has direct farm payments and a longer-term CAP. To get the full benefit of dynamic alignment, we also need the right agricultural policy in the UK to promote long-term innovation and competitiveness, but that is a topic in its own right.

FARM-MADE SEED



For anyone with questions about their farm saved seed declarations, there's a comprehensive FAQ's document which includes sections on SFI mixes on the BSPB website. If your question isn't answered there, please contact the office.

PRECISION BREEDING

In the last newsletter we covered the passage of the secondary legislation on precision breeding which set a date of mid-November for the technology to become a reality in England. This is something the BSPB has lobbied on for years, but we say ‘should’ become a reality because at the time of writing we are still awaiting the final few parts of the jigsaw to be put in place by Defra and the Food Standards Agency for this to happen. The BSPB message to Government has been clear – we must see precision breeding fully implemented in a commercially viable way as soon as possible. Any delays risk seeing the investment, innovation, and opportunities for breeders and growers going elsewhere or being missed.

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