

To the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment in the Scottish Government
Mr Richard Lochhead

by email

17th August 2015

Dear Mr Lochhead

Your announcement that the Scottish Government proposes to ban cultivation of all genetically modified crops, regardless of current or future scientific evidence about the benefits of particular applications, risks constraining Scotland's contribution to research and leaving Scotland without access to agricultural innovations which are making farming more sustainable elsewhere in the world.

As you and others have indicated, this decision is political and not based on any informed scientific assessment of risk. This is of course your prerogative. It is an approach to evidence that surprises and disappoints many scientists and non-scientists alike. Scotland's scientific leadership dates back to the Enlightenment of the 18th century and continues now with world-class universities and science institutes.

Genetic modification of plants has become a well established method and has a 20-year track record of safe use worldwide, as evidenced by the European Academies Science Advisory Council report, *Planting the Future*. Scientists are developing new plant breeding techniques that may be classified as GM in the future. Scottish researchers and agricultural challenges, such as potato blight and tree diseases, have informed that scientific development. Will they now be prevented from making further contributions in future?

Traits currently being investigated that might benefit Scotland's farmers, consumers and environment include potatoes that can reduce fungicide use and omega-3 enriched oilseeds that could provide a more sustainable source of feed for salmon farming. There are many other needs for the development of disease-resistant, pest-resistant and climate resilient crops, where a GM method has a contribution to make.

By banning their use in Scotland, this country would be prevented from benefiting from future innovations in agriculture, fisheries and healthcare and consigned to continued use of the old. We are thus extremely concerned about the potential negative effect on science in Scotland. We ask urgently for a meeting where researchers can discuss these concerns with you and consider ways to protect the freedom and integrity of science, and its use in policies, in Scotland in the future.

Yours sincerely

Academia Europaea
Biochemical Society
British Society of Plant Breeders
Durham Crop Improvement Centre
European Academies Science Advisory Council

Institute of Food Science and Technology
John Innes Centre
National Farmers Union
National Institute of Agricultural Botany, Cambridge
National Institutes of Bioscience
Public Research and Regulation Initiative
Robert Gordon University
Rothamsted Research
Royal Society of Edinburgh
Society for Applied Microbiology
Society for Experimental Biology
School of Biosciences at the University of Kent
Science Council
Science Team, Eden Project
Sense About Science
The Roslin Institute
The Sainsbury Laboratory, Norwich
UK Plant Science Federation
University of Bangor
University of Dundee
University of Edinburgh
University of Hertfordshire
Wissenschaftskreis Grüne Gentechnik (WGG)

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