

## **Plant Science Newsletter – a monthly round-up of policy headlines and stories**

**February 2021**

This newsletter provides links to published news articles from a range of sources. Views or opinions presented are those of the original author(s) and do not necessarily represent the views of the Royal Society of Biology.

### **News and debate**

#### **RSB news**

##### **[A new leaf: Society's advisory group for plant science gets new name](#)**

The UK Plant Sciences Federation (UKPSF) is renamed RSB Plant Science Group

#### **Plant health and biosecurity**

##### **[New legislation to address the plant health threat posed by \*Xylella\*](#)**

The Government announces new measures against *Xylella* to improve plant biosecurity.

##### **[Researchers Develop Cavendish Bananas Resistant to Panama Disease](#)**

A team based at Queensland University of Technology (QUT) have successfully developed a line of Cavendish bananas resistant to Panama disease tropical race 4 (TR4).

##### **[Tomato Brown Rugose Fruit Virus – Update](#)**

The Defra Plant Health rolling briefing on tomato brown rugose fruit virus (ToBRFV) is updated, noting that there have been six outbreaks in commercial tomato production sites in England.

#### **Plant breeding**

##### **[Co-op becomes first UK retailer to reject gene-edited food](#)**

The Co-op has announced that it will not stock products made from gene-edited plants and animals until strong regulation is in place.

##### **[Soybean could help diversify crop production in the UK, say scientists](#)**

A new study has shown that soybean could be more widely farmed in the UK, with plant breeding and climate change making the crop a more viable choice.

## Agriculture

### ['AHDB Horticulture levy will be scrapped', says Eustice](#)

Defra secretary tells NFU Live he will respect outcome of ballot but says government is exploring options to retain certain valued services offered by R&D body.

### [Eustice sets out approach for future agriculture policy](#)

Speaking at the NFU conference 2021, Environment Secretary George Eustice, sets out the UK Government's approach for future agriculture policy now that the UK has left the EU.

### [Steep rise in UK's consumption of organic food](#)

Soil Association announces largest year-on-year increase in sales of organic produce in 15 years.

### ['I harvest 70 million daffodils a year but £1 a bunch can't last'](#)

Speaking to the BBC, a Lincolnshire farmer reports rising costs of labour, refrigeration and transport for daffodil producers.

### [How the seed potato industry is reacting to loss of EU market](#)

The UK leaving the EU leaves seed growers with tough decisions on their cropping plans for this coming spring, says Farmers Weekly.

## Food security

### [Biotechnology for African food security](#)

Transgenic maize for human consumption and livestock feed has the capacity to increase yields for a variety of farming operations in Africa and the potential to ensure food security in the face of climate change, a new study published in Nature Food shows.

### ['Perfect storm' of COVID-19, climate change, biodiversity loss and Brexit affecting UK food security, report warns](#)

A major research effort into the state of UK food security reports that the COVID-19 pandemic is affecting both UK and global food and nutrition security and adding to a 'perfect storm' of threats to society from climate change, biodiversity loss and ecosystem degradation at a time of considerable change further compounded by Brexit.

## Biodiversity and conservation

### ['Reservoirs of life': how hedgerows can help the UK reach net zero in 2050](#)

The Guardian reports on the benefits of hedgerows, amid calls for Britain's hedge network to be extended

### [Rare wild plant flourishes in Suffolk car park 'nature reserve'](#)

One of the country's rarest and most threatened wild plants has 'astounded' conservationists by thriving on an industrial-estate nature reserve, reports BBC News.

## Forestry

### [Row over UK tree-planting drive: 'We want the right trees in the right place'](#)

Forestry Commission accused of funding non-native plantations that damage peatlands and imperil rare species, The Guardian reports.

### [Brexit: Ban on GB to NI tree sales 'a major setback'](#)

BBC News reports that Northern Ireland tree buyers are cancelling orders for thousands of trees because of a post-Brexit ban on plants being moved from Great Britain.

### [COP26 brings countries together to protect world's forests](#)

A UK Government press release describes a new initiative to protect rainforests from further destruction while ensuring development and trade is sustainable.

### [Digging in: a million trees planted as villages and schools join climate battle](#)

The Guardian reports on community forest projects, which have seen a surge in volunteers keen to reduce CO2 emissions by creating new woodlands.

### ['Our forests are sick,' Germany's agriculture minister says](#)

The German agriculture minister describes damage to German forests from drought, storms and pest infestation, highlighting the dramatic effects of climate change on the ecosystem, EURACTIV Germany reports.

## Sustainability

### [Experts identify 'super-plant' that absorbs roadside air pollution](#)

Bushy variety of cotoneaster works best in areas of heavy traffic, say researchers, while other plants can cool buildings or reduce flooding.

### [Farming emissions are threatening the Paris Agreement. Here's why](#)

Without substantial changes in farming practices, rising emissions from human land-use will jeopardize the goals of the Paris climate agreement, a new study shows.

### [Plant-based diets crucial to saving global wildlife, says report](#)

Vicious circle of cheap but damaging food is biggest destroyer of nature, says UN-backed report, described in The Guardian.

### ['A role model': how Seville is turning leftover oranges into electricity](#)

A pilot scheme in the Spanish city will use methane from fermenting fruit to create clean power for water plant, The Guardian reports.

## Other news

### [New UK centre of excellence to help improve global food security threatened by climate change](#)

A new UK centre of excellence is being set up by partners on the Norwich Research Park to improve global food security which is threatened by the effects of climate change.

## People

### [Q&A: Women must 'do the hard stuff' to stand out](#)

Speaking to SciDev.Net, Dr Agnes Kalibata, President of the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA), shares thoughts on life experiences and describes the work that is helping to transform Africa's agricultural sector through programmes designed to reach millions of smallholders.

## Opinion

### [Why keeping one mature street tree is far better for humans and nature than planting lots of new ones](#)

Writing in The Conversation, Professor Mary Gagen highlights the benefits and the plight of large street trees.

## Opportunities

### [Applications Open for 2021 Policy Lab: Reducing Food Loss and Waste to Contribute to Net Zero Emissions from the Food System](#)

The Global Food Security programme (GFS) invites applications from post-doctoral researchers at an early stage of their careers to take part in the 2021 Policy Lab on reducing food loss and waste. This is particularly focused on reducing emissions from the food system and contributing to net zero goals.

Closes: 21 March 2021

### **RSB Gopher Science Lab free online training for primary teachers**

The Royal Society of Biology is offering 40 state-funded primary schools in the UK the opportunity for four teachers to have free access to RSB's Gopher Science Lab [online training course](#). With thanks to generous support from [The Worshipful Company of Horners](#) enabling RSB to offer this opportunity. Primary school teachers working in UK based, state-funded, primary schools can email [Amanda Hardy](#) to apply on behalf of their school to access the paid-for online training places on a first come first served basis.

### **RSB's Science at Home festival resources online**

RSB and some of our science friends have worked together to run our first ever virtual science festival - [RSB's Science at Home](#) - with activities and resources available online, so you can now take part in the festival any time that suits you. With a range of videos, activities, games and more straight to your computer screen to entertain and engage you and your family. Take part today and tell your friends via [#RSBScienceAtHome](#).

## Consultations

### [Defra consultation on the regulation of genetic technologies](#)

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is consulting on the regulation of gene edited (GE) organisms and gathering views on the wider regulatory framework governing genetically modified organisms (GMOs). The RSB response to this consultation is currently in draft. Please contact [consultation@rsb.org.uk](mailto:consultation@rsb.org.uk) for more information and if you would like to contribute.

**Closes: 17 March 2021**

### [RSB Policy Resource Library online](#)

The RSB has created a searchable, digital library of more than 800 statements, responses, briefings and other policy resources produced by the RSB and our Member Organisations across the biosciences. This collection is freely and openly accessible to everyone, including members and non-members, through the [mySociety portal](#) (no registration necessary).

## Events

### [Voice of the Future 2021](#)

**10 March 2021**

Young scientists and engineers will question MPs and Ministers about the issues that matter to them, online, at Voice of the Future 2021.

### [#UKPlantSciPresents webinar series](#)

The series returns for its spring season. View the full range of presentations and register for free [here](#). Recordings of all past webinars are available to view, and further webinar titles will be announced as the year progresses. Thanks to support for this series from the Monogram Small Grains Network, Bristol Centre for Agricultural Innovation, NovogeneUK and Arabidopsis Events UK.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic all RSB events will continue to take place online and updated information will be made available on the [RSB events pages](#). We recommend also checking other external event webpages for updates and continuing to monitor and follow official advice.

## And finally...

### [Cambridge moonflower: Team 'overwhelmed' by global response](#)

BBC News reports on the global interest in rare flowering event livestreamed from a glasshouse in Cambridge University Botanic Garden.

### [Growing the future report](#)

*Growing the future* highlights to policymakers and others the excellence of plant science in the UK, and its importance to the biosciences, the economy, and society both at home and around the world. The report is available to download [here](#).

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