

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

September 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

Top stories

[Plans to unlock power of gene editing unveiled](#)

The Government announces changes to rules on the use of gene editing technologies, following a major consultation.

[Royal Society of Biology welcomes Government announcement on the regulation of genetic technologies](#)

The RSB has issued a statement welcoming the outcome of the consultation on genetic technologies regulation.

RSB news

[Society urges PM to take the lead in tackling “deadly” climate crisis](#)

The RSB has written to prime minister Boris Johnson ahead of November’s COP26 climate summit in Glasgow, urging his Government to do justice to the UK’s history of leadership on environmental issues.

Plant health and biosecurity

[Consultation to protect plants from harmful pests and diseases](#)

Consultation launched to inform new Plant Biosecurity Strategy for Great Britain.

Plant breeding

[Gene-edited crops: 'No plans' to relax rules in Wales](#)

There are no plans to relax the regulation of gene-edited crops in Wales, the Welsh government has said.

[Commission, NGOs brace for gene-editing battle](#)

New genomic techniques (NGTs) have received the backing of the European Commission in a strategy paper, while NGOs promise an intense campaign against them over the coming years.

Agriculture

[Most agricultural funding distorts prices, harms environment: UN report](#)

Around 87% of the \$540 billion in total annual government support given worldwide to agricultural producers includes measures that are price distorting, and that can be harmful to nature and health, reports United Nations News.

[Crop farmers' fears as fertiliser costs 'soar'](#)

The spike in gas prices has caused costs of manufactured agricultural fertiliser to rise, BBC News reports.

[Cocktail of pesticides in almost all oranges and grapes, UK study finds](#)

The Guardian reports on figures showing that traces of 122 different pesticides are found in 12 fruit and veg products.

[France threatened with legal action over use of pesticides](#)

Widespread use of chemicals that can harm wildlife means French state has failed to protect the country's flora and fauna, say NGOS

[Pesticides and health](#)

New briefing from the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology summarises the evidence on routes of human exposure to pesticides and potential impacts on human health.

Food security

[UN summit seeks to fix food's many problems, but draws fire](#)

The United Nations food summit aims to tackle hunger, nutrition, sustainability and inequality, but attracts criticism as too close to corporate interests.

[Most infants in 91 countries are malnourished, warns Unicef](#)

Climate crisis, conflict and Covid stunting progress on nutrition, UN says on eve of food security summit.

[Disastrous season means UK shoppers could pay 50% more for pasta](#)

Price of durum wheat up by 90% after drought devastates harvest in Canada, one of the biggest producers, The Guardian reports.

[Salt-tolerant crops 'revolutionise' life for struggling Bangladeshi farmers](#)

As sea levels rise, growers are turning to varieties of fruits and vegetables that can grow in saline soils.

Biodiversity and conservation

[Climate change: Wildlife and plant species decline 'a crisis'](#)

Stopping the decline in wildlife and plant species is as important as tackling climate change, the head of Natural Resources Wales (NRW) has said.

[Scotland's peatlands 'have been undervalued for years'](#)

A recent study estimated that restoring Scotland's damaged peatlands could bring nearly £200m of annual benefits, BBC News reports.

[Kew Gardens: Royal Botanic Gardens breaks record for largest plant collection](#)

Kew Gardens has set a new record for the largest living plant collection at a single site, BBC News reports.

Forestry

[Up to half of world's wild tree species could be at risk of extinction](#)

Global study calls for urgent action to prevent ecosystem collapse, with farming the biggest cause of die-off

[NFU Cymru wants incentives for farmers to plant trees](#)

Farmers should be incentivised to plant trees on their land, a farming union has said.

[Leaked EU anti-deforestation law omits fragile grasslands and wetlands](#)

Campaigners say draft regulation contains many loopholes, including exclusion of Cerrado and Pantanal.

[Menai whitebeam: Bangor University to protect endangered tree](#)

University researchers are leading efforts to save one of the world's most threatened species of tree, after finding it growing a few miles away.

[New woodlands created in tree planting drive](#)

Thousands of acres of new woodlands along rivers are to be planted to help manage flood risks and boost water quality and wildlife.

Opinion

[Science can rescue farming. Relaxing gene editing rules should be the start](#)

As the UK prepares to approve genome editing, a leading food scientist argues it should also ease up on GM crops

[Time to tip our food systems towards a sustainable and equitable future](#)

By finding well targeted 'tipping points', a sustainable, resilient, and more equitable world food system can still be created, argue Simon Sharpe and Tim Lenton.

[Desertification is turning the Earth barren – but a solution is still within reach](#)

The expansion of drylands is leaving entire countries facing famine. It's time to change the way we think about agriculture

Opportunities

Get involved in developing expert events:

We are seeking two RSB members to volunteer their expertise and represent us (one each) on the [JPAG](#) meeting committees developing seminars for 2022. The meetings to be developed by the group will cover the topics:

- Antibody-drug conjugates to be run in May 2022
- Orthogonality of methods for biological analysis to be held later in 2022

If you have expertise and interest in these areas and would like to get involved in the current development of these meeting programmes please:

1. Apply via mySociety <https://my.rsb.org.uk/services.php?section=jobs&jobid=69>
2. Complete the expertise and interest section of mySociety (in the Your Profile section)

This opportunity is for MRSB and FRSB. The RSB is committed to ensuring equal opportunities in the life sciences, and supports diversity throughout learning and in careers. Applications as soon as possible please.

Closes: 8 October 2021

[Higher Education Bioscience Teacher of the Year Award](#)

Now open for nominations, the award aims to identify the UK's leading bioscience higher education (HE) teachers, recognising the invaluable role they play in educating and inspiring the next generation of biologists. If you know a bioscience lecturer who deserves recognition for their passion and ideas, encourage them to submit an application this year.

Closes: 30 November 2021

[STEM for BRITAIN 2022](#)

STEM for BRITAIN is a poster competition for early-stage researchers which is held in the Houses of Parliament. Applications are invited in five subject categories: Biological and Biomedical Sciences, Physics, Engineering, Mathematical Sciences and Chemistry. Finalists will be invited to an event in the Houses of Parliament where they will present their poster to Parliamentarians and the subject judges. Applications are now open for STEM for BRITAIN 2022. The closing date for applications is Monday 6th December 2021. The finals of the competition will be held in the Houses of Parliament on Monday 7th March 2022 (subject to COVID-19 restrictions).

Competition and exhibition of posters by early-stage and early-career research scientists, engineers, technologists and mathematicians.

Closes 6 December 2021

Consultations

[Beaver reintroduction and management in England](#)

The Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra) wants to know what you think about their proposed approach to beaver reintroduction and management in England.

Closes: 17 November 2021

[Plant biosecurity strategy for Great Britain](#)

Defra wants to know your views on how the Government, the plant industry, and the public can help improve plant biosecurity in Great Britain.

Closes: 30 November 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

[British Society for Plant Pathology LGBTQIA+ Networking Event](#)

We would like to invite LGBTQIA+ BSPP members to join us for a virtual discussion. The focus of this event will be on community building and getting to know each other.

28th October 2021 at 4:00 pm - 6:00 pm BST Free

[BSPP2021 – Our Plants, Our Future \(OPOF\) - Joint conference from BSPP and the EFPP](#)

This major joint meeting, postponed from last year, will address scientific, practical and policy aspects of plant health. Inspired by the International Year of Plant Health (IYPH), the meeting is aimed at a wide audience, from plant scientists to plant health practitioners. This will be a fantastic opportunity at a premier conference centre to meet and mingle with colleagues from across Europe. Early bird tickets at a reduced rate are available until 30th September. The call for abstracts for speakers and posters is also open until 31st October.

Birmingham and online, 6th-8th December 2021

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...

[Clover growth in Mars-like soils boosted by bacterial symbiosis](#)

To explore a possible role for symbiotic nitrogen-fixing bacteria in astroagriculture, researchers have grown clover in man-made regolith that closely matches that of Mars.

[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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