

# **All-Party Parliamentary Group on Science & Technology in Agriculture**

## **Notes of Inaugural Meeting held on Tuesday 11 July 2017, Meeting Room Q, Portcullis House**

### **Present:**

Julian Sturdy MP (Chair)  
Earl of Selborne  
Earl of Lindsay  
Lord Cameron of Dillington  
Duke of Montrose  
Jo Churchill MP  
Daniel Pearsall, Group Co-ordinator

### **1. Welcome & Introduction**

Julian Sturdy (JS) welcomed Members to the All-Party Group's Inaugural Meeting for the new Parliamentary session, noting that this was intentionally a shorter session than usual – without guest speakers or stakeholders – to enable Members to administer the formal requirements to re-register the Group and to hold a brief discussion on priorities for the Group and its future meeting programme.

At the end of his first year as Chairman, JS briefly reviewed the Group's meeting programme over the past 12 months, noting that the the Group continued to cover a good balance and range of topics, with a varied meeting format to include late afternoon and breakfast meetings as well as joint meetings with other APPGs.

JS and Members thanked DP for his support as co-ordinator, and core stakeholders for their continued sponsorship of the Group.

JS observed that the Group was one of the more active and influential interest Groups at Westminster, adding that the importance of access to scientific and technological innovation in UK agriculture would be a critical issue over the coming years, particularly in view of Brexit and its potential impact on trade, competition and future levels of agricultural support.

Members agreed that a key objective for the Group going forward would be to ensure that modern, science-based agriculture continued to be viewed as a strategically significant sector of the UK economy, and that the policy focus and support for the UK agri-tech sector should not be not lost or diminished amid the political flux and uncertainty surrounding the Brexit negotiations.

In particular JS highlighted concerns that growth in UK agricultural productivity and production efficiency was still flat-lining compared with other countries, noting that the latest Defra estimates of Total Factor Productivity (TFP) for the sector declined by 2.5% in 2016. While average growth in TFP over the past 40 years had been around 1.5% pa, improvements in recent years had been more modest, averaging just 4% for the past decade. This compared with equivalent figures of around 40% for Brazil and 16% for the United States, signalling the scale of the productivity challenge facing UK agriculture.

### **2. Election of chair and officers**

The nomination of Julian Sturdy MP to continue to serve as Chair of the Group was approved with the agreement of all Members present.

Nominations for the Earl of Selborne, Lord Haskins, the Earl of Lindsay and Angela Smith MP to continue as Vice-Chairs of the Group were approved with the agreement of all Members present.

Nominated by Julian Sturdy MP and seconded by the Early of Lindsay, Lord Cameron of Dillington was elected to serve as a additional Vice-Chair of the Group.

### **3. Income and expenditure statement**

A draft income and expenditure statement for the Group (attached as an appendix) covering the period 6 July 2016 to 5 July 2017 was approved with the agreement of all Members present.

### **4. Consideration of draft APPGSTA priorities**

DP introduced a document setting out six key priorities for the All-Party Group. Given the critical challenges facing science and technology in agriculture in the lead up to Brexit and beyond, this was intended to frame the Group's future work programme and objectives.

Further to discussion among Members and subject to minor textual amendments, the following six priorities were agreed:

*(i) Promote a strong UK policy focus on agricultural science and innovation as a driver of economic growth and response to global food security and environmental challenges*

*(ii) Ensure future UK regulation of agri-science innovation is evidence-based, proportionate and enabling*

*(iii) Champion the UK's role as a global agri-science hub, attracting inward investment and expertise and developing an export market for technological solutions*

*(iv) Promote the importance of investment in agricultural science and innovation with an effective and sustainable balance between the funding requirements of fundamental, applied and translational R&D (including knowledge exchange) in the agri-science sector to promote a rapid transition from discovery to application of innovation*

*(v) Seek the definition and application of clear and measurable targets for the appropriate application of sustainable intensification in UK agriculture, applying developments in data science to promote efficient and environmentally sensitive production, support policy development, and frame the R&D agenda*

*(vi) Promote more positive public engagement with agricultural science and technology to attract new entrants to the sector and encourage the next generation of agricultural scientists.*

### **5. Future meetings programme – discussion**

DP reported that preparations for the All-Party Group's first two meetings in the new Parliamentary session were already under way. On 12 September, a session was planned on post-Brexit demand for innovation in the UK fresh produce sector, when expert speakers from across the science base, growers and the supply chain would highlight the critical role of science and technology in maintaining competitiveness, addressing labour availability issues and increasing self-sufficiency in the UK fresh produce sector post-Brexit – the short-term concerns over supplies from southern Europe earlier this year providing a timely reminder that the UK is only 50 per cent self-sufficient in fresh produce.

The Group's second meeting, in November (date to be confirmed), would focus on the outcome of the Youth Agriculture Summit taking place in Brussels in October. Held every two years, DP explained that the Summit aims to engage with the next generation of agriculturalists in shaping decisions about the future priorities and objectives for global agriculture. The Summit involves 100 delegates aged 18-25 from 49 different countries. Selection of these global delegates is decided through an essay competition managed at country level. Following the Summit, the four delegates selected to represent the UK have been invited to present the summary report of the Youth Ag Summit to APPG Members and Stakeholders in November, and to share some of their thoughts on the role of science and technology in delivering a sustainable future for global agriculture.

Members also considered and approved the following proposed topics for future meetings, in no particular order of priority. In addition, Lord Selborne suggested innovation in soil science as an important and timely issue for discussion.

#### **International opportunities for UK agri-science**

Showcasing the global contribution of UK science and technology, both in terms of supporting international development objectives and driving commercial agri-tech exports. Potential joint session with the APPG on Agriculture and Food for Development, with support from UKTI.

#### **Role of science in future domestic agriculture policy**

The NFU has developed proposals for the future of UK agricultural policy based around three pillars of managing volatility, driving productivity and competitiveness and protecting the environment. Consideration of how science fits into our future farm policy will provide an important opportunity for the APPG to discuss and highlight the central role of agri-science in developing progressive, evidence-based policies and a sustainable and innovative UK farm sector.

#### **UK Agri-Tech Strategy Update**

APPGSTA hosted the Parliamentary launch of the UK Government's Agri-Tech Strategy in September 2013. Four years on it would seem timely to hear more about the progress of the Strategy, including the Catalyst Fund and the four Centres for Agricultural Innovation – covering agri-informatics, precision farming, crop protection and livestock production.

#### **Knowledge transfer in UK agriculture**

Highlighting the importance not only of scientific discovery and innovation, but also ensuring advances are transferred onto farm. Important opportunity to consider how the organisation and delivery of KT in agriculture has evolved in recent decades, including the use of new forms of communication and the effectiveness of different approaches – to include AHDB Monitor Farms programme and the newly-launched Farm Advisory Service (FAS) in Scotland.

Concluding the meeting, JS thanked Members for their attendance and contribution to a short but productive session.

## Appendix 1

### INCOME AND EXPENDITURE STATEMENT

**Name of group:** All-Party Parliamentary Group on Science & Technology in Agriculture

**Period covered by this statement:** 6 July 2016 to 5 July 2017

#### Income and Expenditure

The group receives no direct income from membership subscriptions, monetary donations, trading income or interest and therefore incurred no direct expenditure over the course of the year.

#### Value of benefits in kind

Source	Description	Value £s	Received
Front Foot Communications Ltd	<p>Front Foot Communications Ltd provides the secretariat to the APPG: primarily this involves organising meetings, liaising and corresponding on behalf of the group, producing the group's annual report and maintaining the group's web-site.</p> <p>Front Foot Communications Ltd is paid by the following organisations to act as the APPG's secretariat: National Farmers Union, National Institute of Agricultural Botany, National Association of British and Irish Millers; Fera Science Ltd; British Society of Plant Breeders; British Growers Association; Agricultural Biotechnology Council; Crop Protection Association; Agricultural Industries Confederation</p>	16,501 - 18,000	06/07/2016 – 05/07/2017
Agricultural Biotechnology Council	Refreshments at launch of <i>Cultivating the Future</i> report	Up to 1500	14/12/2016