

USDA Foreign Agricultural Service

GAIN Report

Global Agricultural Information Network

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POLICY

Required Report - public distribution

Date: 7/16/2015

GAIN Report Number:

United Kingdom

Agricultural Biotechnology Annual

UK GE Plants and Animals Report 2015

Approved By:

Stanley S. Phillips

Prepared By:

Jennifer Wilson

Report Highlights:

Politically, agricultural biotechnology is currently a conundrum for the recently elected United Kingdom (UK) government. With a referendum looming on whether to stay in the European Union (EU), biotechnology is a policy area that the UK could potentially reap economic benefit from autonomous regulation. Consumer acceptance has received a positive bounce with a recent British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) documentary aired at prime time that questioned the morality of the anti-biotechnology position. The television program asked non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to account for the potentially negative outcomes of their anti-biotechnology position and for evidence of detrimental effects to human health. Most of the major grocery stores now permit their private label animal products to be fed genetically engineered (GE) products, and, in time, the food industry may have greater confidence to incorporate more products of genetic engineering in the supply chain.

Executive Summary:

Politically, the current UK position on agricultural biotechnology within the EU setting is something of a conundrum for the newly-elected Conservative government. The Prime Minister and the majority of his Party wish the UK to remain within the EU (with a renegotiated position). However, there is awareness that the UK might be freed from the politics of other Member States, and benefit economically, if they had the autonomy to regulate biotechnology.

With regard to the current EU Commission proposal to give Member States more freedom to approve or ban the import and use of animal feed and human consumption, the UK is still developing its position. While the UK supports the principle of greater subsidiarity for Member States, for this proposal they want more information on how it is compatible with the single market; how the national bans would be compatible with WTO rules; and what the impact of the proposal would be on the availability of animal feed in the EU.

The latest shift in the sophisticated debate on agricultural biotechnology within the UK builds on the widely accepted case for the technology in light of global population growth, food security, climate change and delivering sustainable agriculture. A recent episode of the BBC documentary program – Panorama (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6KruFQ2uCqk>) - challenged the stance of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), asked them to produce evidence of harm to health and environment from use of the technology, and proposed that non-adoption was immoral. This represents a significant step-up in the positive rhetoric, made all the more powerful for its airing on prime time television. In essence, NGOs were asked to account for potentially negative outcomes of taking a position against a technology that has been found to be safe by multiple countries.

There are strong historic and cultural ties between the UK and the United States. These are clearly demonstrated by the similarity in trends and product availability in retail and foodservice markets. In recent years, the UK has imported more horticultural products and consumer-ready food and drink products as opposed to bulk and intermediate agricultural products from the USA. The de facto closure of large swathes of the UK market after implementation of the EU's 2004 regulation on Genetically Modified Food and Feed (Regulation 1829/2003) affected bulk/lightly processed commodities, including animal feed components: soybean meal, and corn products such as Distillers' Dried Grains (DDGS) and corn gluten feed (CGF), in particular. Confidence to purchase these products is wholly dependent on the status of EU approval (for food and feed) for new GE crops. The main supply nations are located outside of the EU - Argentina, Brazil and the United States. Low Level Presence (LLP) of unapproved GE events in bulk shipments remains a concern that dominates trade decisions, since the threshold for feed is very low at 0.1 percent and only for traits already in the EU approval pipeline. There continues to be zero tolerance for the food supply chain.

Trade statistics highlight what can be achieved in exports from the United States when the approvals and

pricing landscape is conducive: UK imports of soybeans from the United States increased from \$30 million in calendar year 2010 to \$130 million in 2011; soybean meal followed reaching \$100 million in import value in 2012, up from \$27 million in 2011.

Despite being a supporter of the science, the UK has never planted a commercial GE crop, and has no crops under commercial development. The limited portfolio of GE plant products that are approved for cultivation in the EU are not well-suited to UK growing conditions. The UK has some of the largest and most efficient farms in Europe, but increasing weather variability and a reduction in available fungicides and pesticides (as a result of an EU review) has left horticultural production vulnerable.

The UK has a long history of progressive research in plant and animal science. Ensuring continued investment in research, and improving the competitiveness of UK agriculture and food in global markets, is driving UK politicians to be bolder in calling for greater access to commercial applications of genetic engineering. The back-drop of the debates on global population growth, food security, climate change, and sustainable agriculture has led to an increased awareness of the role that genetic enhancement can play. The UK is a strong proponent of more efficient and effective regulation of genetic engineering within Europe. Most of the major grocery stores now permit their private label animal products to be fed GE products, and, in time, the food industry may have greater confidence to incorporate more products of genetic engineering in the supply chain.

As a policy response, the UK has developed a long-term agri-tech strategy focused on knowledge transfer and the practical application of innovative technology to the agricultural sector. The strategy favors multi-center academic collaboration and public-private partnerships. Funding has been allocated for focused Centres for Agricultural Innovation. The first one announced is a Centre for Agri-Informatics and Sustainability Metrics and it is anticipated that other centers will focus on commercializing crop and livestock science.

The forthright approach of the current UK political leadership on this issue may give greater confidence to the food industry to incorporate more products of plant genetic engineering in the food chain. Availability and cost of non-GE ingredients is becoming an issue to the extent that several major supermarket chains and foodservice suppliers are continually reviewing their policies. This is creating a more favorable market for GE animal feed. Incorporation of ingredients derived from GE crops (for example, in poultry feed) is happening on a case-by-case basis so that the cost-benefit analysis to consumers is clear.

As with plant biotechnologies, the UK Government takes a pro-science and generally positive, pragmatic and progressive approach to animal biotechnologies. The UK must implement and follow all EU legislation on animal biotechnologies. The UK has imported embryo progeny of clones or embryos of clone progeny as well as bovine semen which may have come from clones or their progeny. The UK has not imported GE animals or livestock clones.

In terms of UK consumer acceptance for genetic engineering, there is a vocal minority opposed. Most surveys show apathy and lack of knowledge by the general population, who rely heavily on supermarket chains to provide them with safe, quality food. There is a dominance of private label products in the UK market and an inherent trust (cultivated by the retailers) that they will “do the right thing” for their customers.

Generally, there are signs that the ground is shifting in the UK. Trade and even the mainstream media is increasingly making a case for the technology and calling on industry and the public to be more open-minded about potential benefits. There is a growing awareness that European consumers are buying meat from animals fed on GE feed, and a growing acceptance that GE crop derivatives in the food supply chain are inevitable, and to be managed, if not embraced.

CHAPTER 1: PLANT BIOTECHNOLOGY

PART A: Production and Trade

a) PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

The private sector's interest in developing varieties of GE plants suitable for UK and wider EU cultivation has waned. Almost all of the 60 or so crop trials conducted in the UK since 2000 have been subject to vandalism, and this, together with the uncertainty and delays characteristic of the EU approval process, amounts to an unattractive investment. While UK and EU publicly funded laboratory and fieldwork into plant biotechnology continues, it is unlikely that any of the current or recent research, including those below will be brought forward for commercialization in the UK within the next five years.

Crop	Research Facility
Omega-3 oil camelina	Rothamsted Research
High anthocyanin tomatoes	John Innes Centre
Cyst nematode resistant potatoes	University of Leeds
Late-blight resistant potatoes	The Sainsbury Laboratory
Multi-enhanced potatoes	The Sainsbury Laboratory and partners

(Late blight resistance, nematode resistance, reduced bruising, reduced acrylamide on cooking)

b) COMMERCIAL PRODUCTION

Despite being a supporter of the science, the UK has never planted a commercial GE crop and has no crops under development. The limited portfolio of GE plant products that are approved for cultivation in the EU are not well-suited to UK growing conditions.

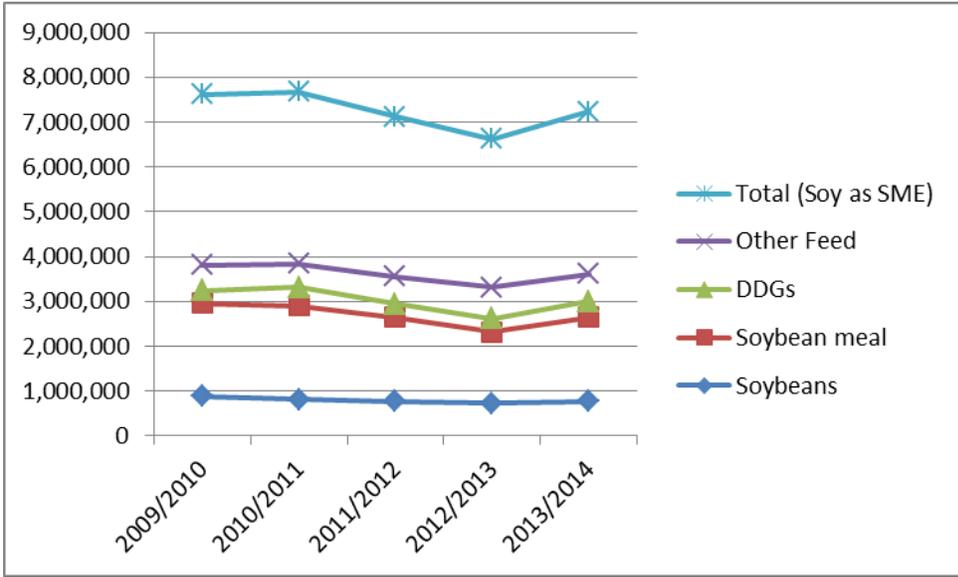
c) EXPORTS

The UK does not export genetically enhanced crops or products to the United States or any other country.

d) IMPORTS

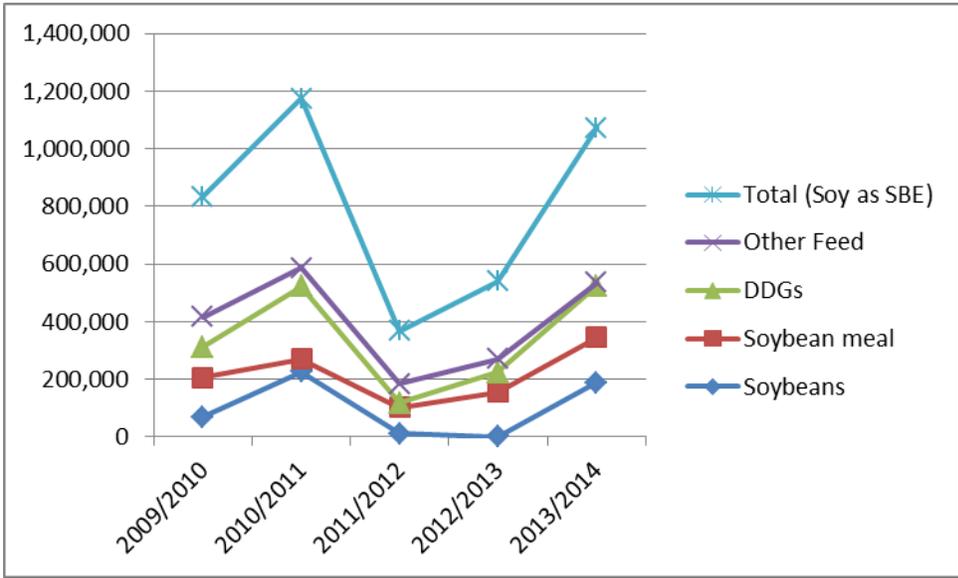
Like their other EU counterparts, UK livestock industries are protein-deficient. Total imports of animal feed products are influenced by animal stocking levels and relative success of the local feed grain harvest. The charts below show UK imports of animal feed commodities that are predominantly from GE crops, and those that the United States may export to the UK when conditions are favorable.

**UK Imports from the World: Soybeans, Soybean Meal, Distillers' Dried Grains,
and Other Animal Feed (metric tons)**



SME = Soybean Meal Equivalent
 Source: Global Trade Atlas/UK HMRC

UK Imports from the United States: Soybeans, Soybean Meal, Distillers' Dried Grains, and Other Animal Feed (metric tons)



SME = Soybean Meal Equivalent
 Source: Global Trade Atlas/UK HMRC

Total imports of these animal feed commodities rebounded slightly in Marketing Year 2013/2014, but it

is clear that the UK is steadily becoming more efficient at deriving its protein requirements from domestic sources, such as rapeseed meal and legumes.

Confidence to purchase from a particular country is dependent on whether there is EU approval (for food and feed) for new GE crops cultivated there. The main supplier countries are located outside of the EU and include Argentina, Brazil and the United States. Low Level Presence (LLP) of unapproved GE events in bulk shipments remains a concern that dominates trade decisions, since the threshold for feed is very low at 0.1 percent (and only for traits already in the EU approval pipeline) and continues to be zero tolerance for the food supply chain.

There is a marked difference between the stability of trade shown in the world imports chart above and the chart showing UK trade with the United States in animal feed commodities. It demonstrates that trade is affected by asynchronous approval timelines when a GE trait is commercially grown in the United States ahead of EU approval. Of course, trade is also dependent on many other things such as availability of supply, demand, exchange rates, etc. However, it is clear that short-term change in sourcing patterns by UK importers is largely linked to the issues of plant biotechnology.

Many UK imports arrive via other EU destination, particularly from the Netherlands port of Rotterdam. Ireland and Belgium are also frequent trans-shipment countries for product ultimately destined for the UK. This routing through other EU Member States makes it difficult to say definitively what proportion of UK imports can be attributed to the original country, such as the United States, Brazil, Argentina, etc.

For over a decade, U.S. exports of processed foods and beverages have also been constrained by market conditions and EU legislation pertaining to GE food products. As a result of a historically negative image of agricultural biotechnology, UK supermarkets and food manufacturers formulate their regular grocery products to exclude GE ingredients. Usually the GE element of processed foods is a small component of the overall product, for example, soy lecithin (used as an emulsifier). This means that the additional cost of sourcing non-GE ingredients adds only a small contribution to the finished price of the goods. However, for many U.S. companies, the additional burden to source non-GE ingredients to supply the EU is often too large a hurdle to overcome. This is also increasingly the case for other countries wishing to supply the EU. As around 30 countries now produce GE crops it is becoming ever-harder to source non-GE ingredients.

e) FOOD AID RECIPIENT COUNTRIES

The UK is not a recipient of Food Aid.

PART B: Plant Biotechnology Policy

a) REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

As a Member State, the UK must implement all EU Directives and Regulations since novel foods and processes is an aspect of food law that is harmonized throughout the EU.

Responsible UK authorities

1. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) regulates genetically modified organisms (“GMOs”) in contained use (e.g., in a laboratory). Link to [HSE](#)

2. The Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra) is responsible for the control of the deliberate release of GE agricultural products and for national, EU and international policy on the environmental safety of such products. Link to [Defra](#), the term used is GM.

Defra is the competent authority that implements and enforces Directive 2001/18/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 12 March 2001 on the deliberate release into the environment of GE agricultural products genetically modified organisms. EU [Directive 2001/18/EC](#)

Defra provides the secretariat for the Advisory Committee on Releases to the Environment (ACRE). ACRE is the independent body which reviews applications for field trials of GE agricultural products. Link to [Defra/ACRE](#)

3. The Food Standards Agency (FSA) controls the assessment of GE food for human consumption (food and feed), and consumer labeling of GE foods. Link to [FSA](#), term used is GM.

The FSA is advised on both GE and novel foods by an independent body of experts called the Advisory Committee on Novel Foods and Processes ([ACNFP](#)) and on GE animal feed by the Advisory Committee on Animal Feedingstuffs ([ACAF](#)). The ACNFP is responsible for assessing the safety of novel and GE food, and ACAF is responsible for assessing the safety of GE feed.

The United Kingdom is comprised of England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. The devolved governments of Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales have jurisdiction over agriculture, fisheries, and food policy in their regions. Scotland and Wales are countries with a high proportion of “Less Favored Areas” for agriculture under EU Common Agricultural Policy definitions and they trade heavily on their ‘pristine environment’ image. The political leadership of Scotland and Wales continues to seek the most restrictive policies possible on agricultural biotechnology, including the set-up of “GMO-free zones”. Similarly, Northern Ireland joined forces with the Republic of Ireland to call for Ireland to become a “GMO-free zone” in September 2008. These more rural communities generally feel that growing GE crops risks damaging the reputation of produce from Scotland, Wales, and Ireland that outweighs any benefits that agricultural biotechnology might bring.

In formulating overall UK agricultural biotechnology policy, central government (based in London) solicits views from a wide range of stakeholders, including the devolved Parliaments.

b) APPROVALS

The EU approval process distinguishes between the regulatory treatment of the approval for food, feed, processing and environmental release. For information on EU policy, approval process and pending approvals, please see EU-28 GE Plant and Animals Report coordinated by FAS/USDA Paris at: [FAS/USDA GAIN Report Database](#)

c) FIELD TESTING

Around 60 crop trials have been conducted in the UK since 2000, mainly on corn, sugar beet, oilseed rape, wheat and potatoes.

Recently announced by The Sainsbury Laboratory is a project to combine multiple beneficial traits (late blight resistance, nematode resistance, reduced bruising, reduced acrylamide on cooking) into a potato. This is not yet at the stage of application for field-testing. More information: [The Sainsbury Laboratory](#)

The most recent crop trial approval has been granted to Rothamsted Research for *Camelina sativa* that has been GE to produce omega-3 long chain polyunsaturated fatty acids (commonly referred to as “fish oils”) in the seed oil of the plant. The purpose is to test the agronomic and yield performance of the events, and the trial will take place between April 2014 and October 2017. Additional information is available here: [Rothamsted Camelina Trial](#)

In 2012, Rothamsted Research embarked on a field trial of Cadenza wheat, modified to produce a non-toxic odor - (E) beta-farnesene (EBF) (a naturally occurring chemical found in peppermint plants). It was hypothesized that the release of EBF by the wheat would act as an alarm signal to keep aphids away and attract their native predators, parasitic wasps (Braconidae). However, the project concluded that the modified wheat did not repel aphids in the field as was initially seen in laboratory experiments. The work has illuminated other useful applications, project details are available here: [Rothamsted Research](#)

In addition, the UK has recently completed publicly funded field trials of GE potato lines for resistance to late blight and for nematode resistance. In 2007, a large private biotechnology company undertook a field trial with late blight resistant potatoes. In 2007, the field trial was destroyed by vandalism, but completed successfully in 2008. Despite this, that company decided to halt field trials in the UK, citing delays in the EU approval process and a review of returns on its investment within Europe for its portfolio as a whole.

d) STACKED EVENT APPROVALS

In the EU the approval process for stacked events is the same as for single events. For more information, please see EU-28 GE Plant and Animals Report coordinated by FAS/USDA Paris at: [FAS/USDA GAIN Report Database](#)

e) **ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS**

The UK has no additional requirements on approvals.

f) **COEXISTENCE**

The UK currently does not have a policy. The basis for any UK coexistence policy is likely to be the extensive work carried out and published by SCIMAC (Supply Chain Initiative on Modified Agricultural Crops) in 2006. Information on their proposals for coexistence and liability can be found here: [SCIMAC](#)

The UK government's policy on coexistence of GE crops with conventional or organic crops states: *“If and when genetically modified crops are grown in England commercially, we will implement pragmatic and proportionate measures to segregate these from conventional and organic crops, so that choice can be exercised and economic interests appropriately protected.”*

g) **LABELING**

The EU's labeling requirements are intended to address consumer concerns, and are not related to safety. Labeling regulations for products containing or consisting of GE agricultural products are presented in Regulation (EC) No 1830/2003, article 4B. In general, these labeling regulations apply to bulk agricultural commodities, such as whole grains and oilseeds. The scope of GE products covered is defined in Directive 2001/18, see: [Eur-Lex Europa](#).

Labeling regulations for food and feed products that are produced from agricultural biotechnology are presented in Regulation (EC) No 1829/2003, articles 12-13 for food, and articles 24-25 for feed. These are for products that have undergone varying degrees of processing. In general, all food and feed products containing/consisting of GE traits and/or produced from GE organisms, including products that no longer contain detectable traces of GE traits, must be labeled. The allowable adventitious presence level for EU-approved GE varieties for use in food and feed is set at 0.9 percent. Above this level, all products must be labeled. EU regulations do not require labeling of products that are not food ingredients, such as processing aids. In addition, meat, milk or eggs obtained from animals fed with GE feed or treated with GE medicinal products do not require “GMO” labeling.

Example of How to Label for Food Produced from Genetic Engineering

Article 13 of Regulation 1829/2003 specifies the wording to be used on the label as follows:

(a) Where the food consists of more than one ingredient, the following wording must follow immediately after the ingredient concerned, in brackets: "genetically modified" or "produced from

genetically modified [name of ingredient]. A compound ingredient with a constituent X which is produced from a GE trait Y must be labeled "contains X produced from genetically modified Y. Example: a biscuit containing soy flour derived from GE-soy must be labeled "contains soy flour from genetically modified soy."

(b) Where the ingredient is designated by the name of a category, the following wording must be used in the list of ingredients: "contains genetically modified [name of organism]" or "contains [name of ingredient] produced from genetically modified [name of organism]". Example: for vegetable oils containing rape oil produced from genetically modified rape, the reference "contains rape oil from genetically modified rape" must appear in the list of ingredients.

(c) Where there is no list of ingredients, the words "genetically modified" or "produced from genetically modified [name of organism]" must appear clearly in the labeling. Example 1: "a spirit containing caramel produced from genetically modified corn". Example 2: "genetically modified sweet corn"

(d) If the product consists of or contains a GE trait, e.g., sweet corn in a Mexican salad, the label must state "genetically modified sweet corn"

The designations in (a) and (b) may appear in a footnote to the ingredients list, provided they are printed in a font at least the same size as that of the list of ingredients or, where there is no list of ingredients, clearly on the labeling.

Labeling for Genetically Modified Microorganisms (GMMs) and “Processing Aids

Food and feed (including food and feed ingredients, such as additives, flavorings and vitamins) produced by fermentation using a GMM which is kept under contained conditions and is not present in the final product are not included in the scope of Regulation (EC) No. 1829/2003. These food and feed products are considered as having been produced with the GMM, rather than from the GMM.

Therefore, these products do not have to be labeled like products produced from agricultural biotechnology. Likewise, in the case of GMMs such as yeast used in alcoholic beverages, the EU does not require labeling if the GMM is not present in the final food. This is also true of cheese that has been produced “with” the use of chymosin, an enzyme that is genetically modified. Such processing aids do not fall within the scope of the labeling regulations.

In the UK, traceability and labeling regulations are the responsibility of the Food Standards Agency. UK information on GM food and feed labeling can be found at: [FSA Labelling](#).

Seed Labeling Legislation

In the absence of any EU seed labeling regulation for the adventitious presence of GE seed, the European Commission has advised that any seed lot containing GM seed authorized for the cultivation

has to be labeled as containing “GMOs”. Seed lots containing GE seeds that are not authorized for cultivation cannot be marketed in the EU. In the UK, this is enforced by the GM Inspectorate of the Food and Environment Research Agency (Fera). Currently, the GM Inspectorate is focusing on minimizing the risk of adventitious GE presence in conventional seeds of Brassica napus, Brassica rapa, Glycine max and Zea mays. For more information see: <http://www.gm-inspectorate.gov.uk/>

h) TRADE BARRIERS

Please see text under “IMPORTS” heading above

i) INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY RIGHTS

The UK has a comprehensive system to address Intellectual Property Rights, including an Intellectual Property Office that covers plant breeders’ rights. In addition, the Plant Variety Rights Office, part of the UK government’s Food and Environment Research Agency, administers Plant Breeders’ Rights in the UK. More information: <https://www.gov.uk/plant-breeders-rights>

j) CARTAGENA PROTOCOL RATIFICATION

The UK has ratified the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety. Defra is the contact point, see: [Defra/Cartegena Protocol](#)

The enforcement of this regulation has been implemented in England by way of the Genetically Modified Organisms (Trans-boundary Movements) (England) [Regulations 2004](#). Similar regulations have been implemented in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales).

Biological Diversity is an increasing area of work for the UK government, as agricultural innovation seeks to increase production while at the same time reducing environmental and biodiversity impacts. Biodiversity 2020 – A [strategy for England’s wildlife and ecosystem](#) was launched in 2011.

Increasingly, countries with experience of growing GE crops will be asked how they measure the impact of monoculture/short rotation on wildlife, and for hard statistical results.

k) INTERNATIONAL TREATIES/FORA

A member of the Food and Environment Research Agency’s Plant Health Policy Team, was elected Chair (from 2012-2014) of the Commission on Phytosanitary Measures (CPM), the governing body for the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC). Additional information available here: [Fera Chair for IPPC](#)

l) RELATED ISSUES

The food price spikes of 2008 and ensuing debate and focus on how to deliver global food security, while addressing climate change and feeding a burgeoning population resulted in more positive media coverage for agricultural biotechnology. This, together with the economic downturn and a need for the UK government to support areas that will create economic growth and skilled labor, has created a more favorable policy environment for biotechnology. This may create more confidence in the food retail and

manufacturing base to incorporate derivatives of biotechnology in mainstream grocery products. The majority of consumers look to grocery store chains to determine the quality/price ratio and to rigorously check the safety of the food they purchase. In October 2014, the UK's biotechnology research funder (BBSRC) published a position statement on new crop breeding techniques. It highlights uncertainties with the EU regulatory process for these technologies, but explains the potential benefits of funding this stream of science. See: [BBSRC Press Release on New Crop Breeding Techniques](#)

m) MONITORING AND TESTING

All UK imports are subject to random or more frequent testing (depending on product) upon border entry. Since it is not a food safety concern, testing for genetically enhanced material is normally randomized testing unless the EU Rapid Alert System has flagged a particular product and origin for additional measures. The food supply chain conducts its own testing to satisfy import specifications, labelling obligations, and customer assurance.

n) LOW LEVEL PRESENCE POLICY

The EU has a 0.1 percent threshold for animal feed products, but (as yet) has set no tolerance for the possibility of finding unapproved GE traits in food. As the EU's authorization procedures for new agricultural biotechnology varieties tend to be slower than those of other countries, a time-lag known as 'asynchronous authorization' occurs. To deal with the possible presence of unauthorized varieties in imports of commodity crops, the EU has adopted a measure, Regulation 619/2011, which sets a tolerance level of 0.1 percent for varieties that have a valid application for an EU authorization has been made and which fulfill the requirements set out in Article 2 of the Regulation.

Above this threshold, the product is not allowed on the EU market. Operators must demonstrate that the presence of GM material was adventitious or technically unavoidable. The UK must adhere to the EU Low Level Presence policy and tolerance level for unapproved GE traits being found in shipments. For more information, please see EU-28 GE Plant and Animals Report coordinated by FAS/USDA Paris at: [FAS/USDA GAIN Report Database](#)

The EU's Joint Research Centre has published [guidance](#) on the application of [Regulation \(EU\) No 619/2011](#).

PART C: Plant Biotechnology Marketing

a) MARKET ACCEPTANCE

Since the late 1990s/early 2000s, U.S. agriculture and food exports have been constrained by market conditions and EU legislation on genetic engineering. A focus on the economy and trade (and the prospect of a successful conclusion to the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership negotiations between the United States and the EU) has made a stronger political case for UK access to the products

of genetic engineering. Consistent messaging undertaken by the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Minister is clearly designed to indicate to technology companies that the UK is ‘open for business.’ In addition, the UK government is keen to make the EU regulatory system governing genetically engineered (GE) crops “*more efficient and more effective*”. At present, other countries are benefiting economically from the commercialization of traits that may have started out in UK laboratory research.

Imports of food products containing soy and corn-based products have been particularly negatively affected. In addition, products containing glucose or other sugar components of GE sugar beet or oilseed rape (Canola) must also label, and by doing so the GE presence is highlighted. Some supply chains may decide that they do not want GE ingredients/labeled products and the product may not be listed or carried in UK inventories as a result. There are increasing examples of products overcoming the hurdles, labeling appropriately and achieving sales success. These products are usually those where consumers have a desire for the product or there is a price incentive that counters the presence of GE ingredients, for example, specialty candy bars and oils.

b) PUBLIC/PRIVATE OPINIONS

There are signs that the ground is shifting towards a more positive scenario in the UK. Trade and even mainstream journalism are increasingly making a case for the technology and calling on industry and the public to be more open-minded about potential benefits. There is a growing awareness that European consumers are buying meat from animals fed on GE feed, and a growing acceptance that GE crop derivatives in the food supply chain are inevitable, and to be managed, if not embraced.

The latest shift in the sophisticated debate on agricultural biotechnology within the UK builds on the widely accepted case for the technology in light of global population growth, food security, climate change and delivering sustainable agriculture. A recent episode of the BBC documentary program – Panorama (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6KruFQ2uCqk>) - challenged the stance of NGOs, asked them to produce evidence of harm to health and environment from use of the technology, and proposed that non-adoption was immoral. This represents a significant step-up in the positive rhetoric, made all the more powerful for its airing on prime time television. In essence, NGOs were asked to account for potentially negative outcomes of taking a position against a technology that has been found to be safe by every major Continent.

Numerous opinion polls and consumer surveys have been carried out in relation to British consumer acceptance, or otherwise, of GE food. There is a vocal minority against, but most surveys report apathy and a lack of knowledge by the general population, who rely heavily on supermarket chains to provide them with safe, quality food. There is a dominance of private label products in the UK market and an inherent trust (cultivated by the retailers) that they will “do the right thing” for their customers. Since all of the retail chains publicly declared their private label to be “GM free” in the early 2000s very few ingredients/products derived from agricultural biotechnology have made it onto British shelves.

As the number and adoption of GE products worldwide continues to increase exponentially, availability and the cost of sourcing and segregating GE products has become a real issue for the UK supply chain. No single retailer wants to be the first to undo its previous general stance on agricultural biotechnology. However, movement has been necessary on the animal feed side as the availability of non-GE has rapidly decreased and the cost increased. In 2010, Asda (Walmart) was the first to move to acceptance of GE feed for their private label meat and poultry products and Wm Morrisons Supermarkets followed. More recently (April 2013), Tesco, Cooperative Group, Marks & Spencer, and Sainsbury Supermarkets also communicated to their customers that the poultry and livestock supply chains could no longer source sufficient quantities of non-GE animal feed at a reasonable cost. Organic options are available for those who wish to avoid GE-fed livestock, and the up-scale Waitrose chain (capitalizing on the opportunity to differentiate from its competitors) now requires non-GE feed for both its poultry and pig meat products.

There have been recent calls by lobby groups to label meat and poultry products from animal fed with GE feed (currently exempt from EU labeling law). Some commentators believe that voluntary labeling will help acceptance of GE feed and food, since the labeling will become familiar. Others cite concerns that meat and poultry products from animals fed with GE feed will be seen as the option for the poorest in society, while the richest will have alternatives. However, it is more likely, if given the information and a choice, a large majority of UK consumers will vote with price uppermost in mind.

c) MARKETING STUDIES

A selection of available research:

[Food Standards Agency Consumer Research on GM and Novel Foods](#)

[British Science Association Reports](#)

[Institute of Grocery Distribution Factsheet](#)

[European Crop Protection Association](#)

PART D: Plant Biotechnology Capacity Building and Outreach

a) ACTIVITIES

The United States oilseed and grain trade associations are very active in the UK market. Seminars and trade missions take place frequently. USDA London continues to host seminars and set up meetings for visiting U.S. government personnel or trade allied to this issue. Funding utilized is derived from a mix of industry funds, Market Access Program funds, FAS Country Strategy Statement Funds, as well as State Department funding.

The International Visitors Leadership Program (IVLP) has also provided a valuable opportunity to send

British contacts to the United States on tailored biotechnology or broader agriculture programs.

b) STRATEGIES AND NEEDS

Since the UK government is supportive of the technology, on a case-by-case basis, our strategy involves supporting the UK within the wider EU context. Additional outreach on GE crops is needed to retail, food manufacturers, and consumers – to the extent that is possible.

CHAPTER 2: ANIMAL BIOTECHNOLOGY

Cloning is an animal biotechnology that developers frequently utilize in conjunction with other animal biotechnologies such as genetic engineering and therefore included in this report.

PART E: Animal Biotechnology Production and Trade

a) ANIMAL BIOTECHNOLOGY PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

Research is the main focus for animal biotechnology in the UK. GE animals, such as those below, are

under development but none are expected to be on the market in the UK within the next five years.

Event	Organization
GE mosquitoes to control dengue fever	Oxitec
GE olive fly	Oxitec
Suppression of avian influenza transmission	Roslin Institute
Pigs resistant to African Swine Fever	Roslin Institute

b) COMMERCIAL PRODUCTION

The only GE animals produced in the UK are mice, for research purposes. With regards to products from animal biotechnologies, embryo progeny of clones or embryos of clone progeny have been imported for use in the dairy sector. Bovine semen is also imported, including from U.S. Holstein herds, so it is possible that this has been sourced from clones or their progeny.

c) BIOTECHNOLOGY EXPORTS

The UK has not and does not export GE animals, livestock clones, or products from these animals. Given the aforementioned reference to the beef and dairy sector, it is possible that the UK exports products produced from, and genetics from, the progeny or subsequent generations of clones.

d) BIOTECHNOLOGY IMPORTS

As mentioned above, the UK has imported embryo progeny of clones or embryos of clone progeny as well as bovine semen which may have come from clones or their progeny. No import data is available as these products are not differentiated from other embryos or semen. The UK has not imported GE animals or livestock clones.

PART F: Animal Biotechnology Policy

As with plant biotechnologies, the UK Government takes a pro-science and generally positive, pragmatic and progressive approach to animal biotechnologies. The UK does not have any country specific legislation or registration requirements on animal biotechnologies, it must implement and follow all EU legislation in this area.

With regards to EU legislation, the EU Novel Foods Regulation from 1997 is the only EU legislation covering animal cloning. Under the Novel Foods Regulation, food “produced from nontraditional breeding techniques” (implicitly including cloning) – but not from their offspring – requires a pre-market authorization in order to be imported or sold in the EU. The European Commission will present two new proposals - one on novel foods and one on food from cloned animals – but the timeline remains

uncertain. More information is available [here](#).

The Department for Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs (Defra) plays an overarching role in the implementation of animal biotechnology regulation in the UK. The Health and Safety Executive helps to control the contained use of genetically engineered organisms in the UK to ensure no products or animals are released or exposed to humans without safety inspections and approvals. Further information on Defra's role in the regulation of GE animals and/or livestock clones, is available [here](#)

PART G: Animal Biotechnology Marketing

a) MARKET ACCEPTANCE

No independent market research has been undertaken into the market acceptance of animal biotechnologies in the UK.

b) PUBLIC/PRIVATE OPINIONS

The UK has a number of organizations, such as the Roslin Institute and the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC), active in public, positive engagement on animal biotechnologies. There are also a number of organizations actively campaigning against the technologies, including but not limited to Genewatch, Friends of the Earth, the Soil Association, and Compassion in World Farming (CIWF).

The UK populous is generally apathetic to the technologies although, if asked, is likely to be biased towards more traditional technologies. The UK population is also more sensitive to perceived animal welfare issues associated with the technologies over and above any other aspect. Opinions vary with the intended use of the technology, with medical applications (improved medicines) being the most accepted. If the awareness level on positive animal welfare traits (such as breeding cattle without horns so that they do not have to be de-horned) were higher than it should be expected that this would increase the acceptance of the technologies.

Publicly funded research is more trusted than that undertaken by the private sector, there being an inherent bias towards the acceptance of technology provided free to all as a public good over that perceived to be created for financial reward by private companies. Indeed, UK-based breeding companies have distanced themselves from the technologies, preferring to maintain the trust of the public in their other research.

c) MARKET STUDIES

The [Farm Animal Welfare Committee](#) (FAWC) is an expert committee of Defra. It provides advice to Defra on the welfare of farmed animals, including farmed animals on agricultural land, at market, in transit and at the place of killing. On November 16, 2012, the Committee published its "Opinion on the welfare implications of breeding and breeding techniques in commercial livestock agriculture." The

detailed report is available [here](#). Among its many conclusions, it is notable that it encourages publicly funded animal biotechnology researchers to “engage closely with the livestock breeding industries to target the research effort better towards traits that are likely to have the greatest impact on animal welfare.”

PART H: Animal Biotechnology Capacity Building and Outreach

a) ACTIVITIES

A number of U.S. government speakers have visited the UK and undertaken outreach on new technologies, including but not limited to that in the animal arena. A U.S. government-funded Voluntary Visitor Program also saw opinion leaders from Europe visit the United States in January 2012 to learn more about how animal biotechnology is regulated in the United States and see examples of ongoing research. The group included both a UK Government official and a UK-based media representative.

b) STRATEGIES AND NEEDS

The United States should continue to be open and transparent in the sharing of information on developments in the agricultural biotechnology arena.

Reporting Notes:

1. The United Kingdom (UK) is a member of the European Union (EU) and this report should be read in conjunction with the EU-28 GE Plants and Animals (Biotechnology) Report, coordinated by the Foreign Agricultural Service in Paris, France. The EU Report, is available here: [FAS/USDA GAIN Report Database](#)
2. The term “agricultural biotechnology” refers to an evolving continuum of technologies. It is a broadly applied term that may or may not refer to crops developed through recombinant DNA technologies, i.e., “plant biotechnology,” “genetically modified organism (GMO),” “transgenic,” “biotech crops,” “bioengineered,” or “genetically engineered (GE) crops.”
3. The U.S. government uses the terms biotechnology or genetically engineered (GE) in addressing this topic. However, the EU legislation and Member State implementing regulations use Genetically

Modified (GM) food and feed and Genetically Modified Organisms (GMO). These terms are used in this report when discussing EU legislation and UK implementation.