

Embargo: for immediate release

New farming technology strategy needs to work with nature

Wildlife and Countryside Link [1] today cautioned that the Agri Tech Strategy [2] should not repeat the mistakes of the past by prioritising increasing food production over environmental sustainability.

Abi Bunker, chair of Link's farming group, said "Our wildlife, habitats, landscapes, soil and water continue to suffer from degradation as a result of past pushes to increase food production at all costs. We've learned a lot since then in terms of the need to balance a range of needs from land and how to do this. It's vital that we protect the productive base of agriculture - the environment. Innovation is essential, but we need it to deliver sustainable and integrated solutions which help boost, not reduce, the non-food goods and services we derive from our countryside.

Link recently published a position statement [3] on food security setting out 10 steps it believes could help secure environmentally sustainable food production. Link believes that agri-tech solutions to increasing food production, including genetic modification (GM), should not be promoted at the expense of less risky options that can also help build healthy soils, maintain wildlife habitats and safeguard water resources.

Link also highlighted the need for a more joined up approach by government. Recent calls to increase food production might suggest not enough is currently being produced. In fact, globally we produce more than enough food to feed everyone. Clearly, we need a better food system to ensure that globally this food is distributed equitably. In the short term the UK needs to tackle food waste and encourage people to eat a healthier diet, which places less of a burden on the environment. In the long term we need to ensure we have a resilient farming system which can continue to deliver in a changing climate.

Abi Bunker concluded, "The UK can be a world leader in developing new agricultural technologies but our scientific legacy should be helping the world grow the food we actually need whilst restoring a healthy and biodiverse environment."

Ends

Notes to Editors

[1] Wildlife and Countryside Link (Link) brings together 41 voluntary organisations concerned with the conservation and protection of wildlife and the countryside. Our members practise and advocate environmentally sensitive land management, and encourage respect for and enjoyment of natural landscapes and features, the historic and marine environment and biodiversity. Taken together our members have the support of over 8 million people in the UK and manage over 750,000 hectares of land.

[2] *UK Agricultural Technologies Strategy*, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-agricultural-technologies-strategy>.

[3] *Sustainable and Secure: 10 steps for the future of food*, http://www.wcl.org.uk/docs/Sustainable_and_Secure_May13.pdf.

[4] This press release is supported by the following nine Link members:

- Bat Conservation Trust

- Buglife – The Invertebrate Conservation Trust
- Bumblebee Conservation Trust
- Butterfly Conservation
- Campaign to Protect Rural England
- Friends of the Earth
- Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
- The Wildlife Trusts
- Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust

Wildlife and Countryside Link
July 2013



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