

A gale of fresh air on GE crops in the UK

Exactly a week before this editorial was written, Owen Paterson, the UK Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs spoke at Rothamsted Research some 20 miles north of London and the site last July of unsuccessful protests against the trials of GM-wheat. Founded in 1843, Rothamsted is certainly the oldest agriculture research station in Britain and avowedly the oldest in the world. Your co-editor had the good fortune to be present.

Mr Paterson delivered a speech which many in the room would have wished to have heard from his predecessor some ten or twelve years ago. It would be too much to say that the wait was worth it but the speech was what needed to be said and what everyone present had hoped to hear.

After nearly three years in office, the present UK coalition government has finally announced their policies on GM. Mr Paterson painted a familiar picture of the world population likely to rise from seven billion to nine billion, or even further. He stressed the need for “sustainable intensification” of agriculture if we are to feed ourselves. And, he said: “The era of complacency about food production must come to an end. I believe that it’s time to start a more informed discussion about the potential of genetically modified crops..”

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