

RESPONSE TO APPG PRESS RELEASE: 'APPG chair calls for urgent review of 'illicit' seed use by organic growers'

The Rt Hon George Eustice MP
Secretary of State for Environment Food and Rural Affairs
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Nobel House
17 Smith Square
London
SW1P 3JR

20 August 2021

Dear Secretary of State,

We are writing to rebut the claims made by Julian Sturdy MP, chair of the All-Party Parliamentary group on Science and Technology in Agriculture in a [media release](#) dated 17 August 2021.

The claim that 'illicit' seed is used by organic growers is a falsehood and we are calling for Defra – as the competent authority governing the approval of seed used by certified organic producers – to clearly set the record straight.

As you are aware, the organic sector is strictly regulated under UK law and overseen by Defra. The use of non-organic seed is allowed in organic production but only with prior approval from the grower's Organic Control Body and with the necessary justifications as set out in UK legislation. These approvals are then listed and sent to Defra on a monthly basis to ensure their oversight. This process would have had to have been undertaken in the oilseed rape trials referenced in the media release. All procedures on the use of seed were followed to the letter of the law, through the required organic Control Bodies, auditors and SRUC. A comprehensive, open report has been produced.

It is also important to recognise that UK Organic Control Bodies, who oversee the day-day enforcement of the UK organic regulation, are both approved by Defra and independently audited by UKAS on an annual basis.

I would also like to note that former Defra minister Lord Gardiner's comment referenced in the media release and relating to the use of non-organic seed on organic farms is a [falsehood](#) that is a repeat of the apparent error made in the Lord's answer last year to a Parliamentary question in which former farming minister Lord Gardiner was not correct when he made this remark relating to organic food,

To provide additional context; the trials in question represent an important step forward for both organic and conventional farmers. There is an opportunity to expand what is currently a small UK area of organically produced oilseed rape (which further substantiates why organic seed is not available). In showcasing how this important crop can be grown in low-input

regimes and without chemicals applied to the seed, aligns to the environmental ambition of new agricultural farm support and should be celebrated and applauded.

We would be delighted to welcome Mr Sturdy and Lord Gardiner to visit an OF&G certified organic farm in their locality and witness first-hand the strength of the regulation surrounding organic production, as an internationally recognised standard, and to witness the hard work undertaken by organic farmers to ensure they comply with organic legislation.

Now is not the time to make ill-judged and misleading claims about organic production or suggesting that farmers are acting illegally when they are irrefutably not. We would ask that Defra, as the Competent Authority overseeing UK organic legislation, set the record straight immediately and ensure that these types of comments are corrected and withdrawn.

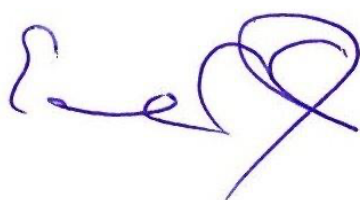
Yours sincerely,

Signed jointly by OF&G and SOPA

Roger Kerr

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "R Kerr", with a horizontal line underneath.

CEO
OF&G (Organic Farmers & Growers)

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "E Smith", with a horizontal line underneath.

Edward Smith
Chairman
SOPA (Scottish Organic Producer's Association)

OF&G is one of the largest control bodies in the UK, certifying over 50% of UK organic land and operating across Great Britain and Northern Ireland, including the Channel Islands and Isle of Man.

OF&G has more than 40 years' experience in the organic sector and is the longest established Defra-approved organic control body. The company's headquarters are in Shrewsbury, Shropshire.

<http://ofgorganic.org/>

SOPA:

- The Scottish Organic Producers Association is uniquely the UK's only membership-based not-for-profit co-operative owning approved Organic Standards, governed by a board of directors, all of whom are rooted in the organic industry in Scotland.
- SOPA holds the only Scottish-based organic standards for farmers, growers and processors.
- SOPA has more than 300 members throughout the UK.
- For more information about SOPA, please contact Anna Davies and Herd PR Agency anna@sceneandherdpr.co.uk

<http://www.sopa.org.uk/>