

Richard Lochhead MSP
St. Andrew's House,
Regent Road,
Edinburgh,
EH1 3DG

Dear Mr Lochhead,

I am writing on behalf of the Society for General Microbiology in response to your announcement that genetically-modified (GM) crops will not be grown in Scotland. While we understand that this policy decision has been taken in the light of a general public concern about GM crops, we believe that this should be tempered with an announcement that there is no scientific evidence that GM crops are harmful. To do otherwise merely increases the misunderstanding and fear about this modern technology.

As microbiologists, we are pleased that the announcement included a clear statement that the contained use of genetic modification is still permitted in Scotland. Scottish scientists are world-leading in microbiology and genetic modification techniques are essential to understand how microorganisms behave as pathogens and as beneficial contributors to human health and to the environment.

Synthetic Biology, a form of GM, has huge potential to contribute to the Scottish economy, as indicated by the Scottish Science Advisory Council in "Synthetic Biology: Opportunities for Scotland". (<http://www.scottishscience.org.uk/sites/default/files/article-attachments/Synthetic%20Biology%20Opportunities%20for%20Scotland.pdf>). Microbiology has an important role to play in Synthetic Biology, and we are pleased that our members are contributing to this research area in Scotland and elsewhere.

Finally, we wish to issue a note of caution. The Scottish seed potato industry brings an estimated £100M a year to the Scottish economy. Scotland is successful because its climate reduces the chances of virus infection of the potato crop. Virus-resistant GM potatoes and blight-resistant GM potatoes have been developed elsewhere in the world, including the rest of the UK. If GM crops gain increasing public acceptance, the Scottish potato industry is at serious risk from its competition.

Similar arguments could be applied to the soft fruit and barley industries. We trust that the policy will be reviewed in light of future changes in the science and public perception.

Yours sincerely



Professor Nigel L Brown OBE FRSE
President, Society for General Microbiology