Moving the dial on GMO regulation and UK-European collaboration on biosolutions: High-level conclusions of UK-EU roundtable, May 2026

Background

Genetically Modified Organisms (GMO) are at the core of biosolutions in Europe and globally. However, the current regulatory framework constrains biosolutions from reaching market. This has long been identified in both the UK and the EU. While the UK has moved ahead in modernising the GMO framework through the 2025 Precision Breeding Act, the retained EU GMO framework continues to pose challenges to biosolutions innovators active in and beyond the precision breeding of plants, both in the UK and EU.

With the UK-EU rest negotiations underway, including greater alignment on an SPS Agreement, and the EU Biotech Act taking shape, it is more important than ever to secure a pro-innovation, cross-European approach to the regulation of GMOs and make a firm commitment to building a truly competitive and sustainable European bioeconomy.

In May 2026, the UK BioIndustry Association (BIA) and European Biosolutions Coalition (EBC) brought together UK and EU innovators and thought leaders to determine practical steps forward for a cross-European approach to GMO, for and beyond the EU Biotech Act, EU-UK reset negotiations, and GMO legislation in the long term.

Key findings: A cross-European approach to GMO

Building on the discussion and participant's reflections, we identified a set of concrete policy directions to advance a more innovation-friendly and aligned GMO regulatory framework across Europe. The below high-level conclusions reflect a clear message from both UK and EU stakeholders: **Europe must modernise GMO regulation through closer UK–EU collaboration if it is to remain competitive in biotechnology and biosolutions globally.**

Participants emphasised that while both the EU and the UK are pursuing pro-innovation regulatory reform, greater alignment, joint experimentation and shared approaches will be

essential to reduce fragmentation, accelerate innovation, and enable cross-border scale-up. Across the discussion, three priority areas emerged where coordinated action can deliver meaningful progress:

- Creating pathways for future regulatory convergence and joint learning, by establishing a cross-European regulatory sandbox on GMO
- Transitioning towards more proportionate, science-based regulatory approaches, moving from authorisation to notification
- Implementing at pace to secure Europe's global competitiveness

Establish a cross-European regulatory sandbox on GMO

We recommend the establishment of a joint UK–EU cross-border regulatory sandbox for GMO plants, designed to test and demonstrate proportionate, science-based regulatory approaches in real-world conditions. Participants highlighted that a sandbox would provide a controlled environment in which innovators and regulators can collaboratively generate evidence, refine risk assessment methodologies, and build shared guidance across jurisdictions. This will address the current uncertainty that arises from similar, yet distinct treatment of gene edited plants under the UK's Precision Breeding Act and the EU's proposal for Novel Genomic Technique (NGT) for plants, paving a way for future mutual recognition agreements and ease of cross-border trade.

By enabling mutual learning and data sharing, the sandbox would directly lower barriers for companies seeking to operate in both markets, making it significantly easier for UK and EU innovators to develop and launch GMO plant products across borders without duplicative processes.

A sandbox would create a structured pathway for regulatory convergence, allowing authorities on both sides to iteratively align standards, build trust in each other's assessments, and move towards mutual recognition of evidence and approvals over time. In doing so, a cross-border sandbox would help reconcile divergent regulatory approaches, and position the UK and EU as a coherent, competitive ecosystem for biosolutions in the long term.

Move from authorisation to notification

We recommend a cross-European shift from authorisation-based approval towards a notification-based regulatory model for genetically modified plants and microorganisms, particularly those with well-understood risk profiles, supported by robust scientific standards and shared assessment principles. Participants stressed that current authorisation processes are slow, unpredictable and resource-intensive, contributing to innovation delays and investment flight. Greater regulator–innovator dialogue and accumulated scientific knowledge could enable more streamlined, proportionate pathways. A notification approach—where developers demonstrate compliance with pre-defined criteria rather than seeking case-by-case approval—would improve predictability and reduce administrative burden, underpinned by high, harmonised scientific standards and a common cross-European regulatory language, ensuring that risk assessments remain rigorous and trusted across jurisdictions.

This shift must be accompanied by reforms to how research is treated. For example, the EU currently regulates field trials of genetically modified plants as deliberate release akin to marketisation, limiting the ability to generate real-world evidence and constraining innovation at an early stage. Enabling research trials under more proportionate, science-led conditions would allow data generation to inform notification criteria and build regulatory confidence.

Moving towards a notification-based system—underpinned by shared standards, strengthened scientific dialogue, and a more enabling research environment—would create a more agile, innovation-friendly framework for GMO plants while maintaining safety and public trust.

Implementing at pace to secure Europe's global competitiveness

Europe needs to urgently address the declining global competitiveness in GMOs, including microorganisms and plant innovation. Participants consistently identified that without decisive regulatory reform, Europe, including the UK, risks being left behind. The accelerating pace of biotechnology development globally is a stark signal of the scale and speed of investment and policy coordination needed in Europe. At the same time, Europe's current regulatory environment, characterised by uncertainty, lengthy timelines, and fragmented implementation, continues to drive innovators and investment to more

permissive markets such as the US, resulting in an innovation leakage with limited benefit returning to the sustainability of the European bioeconomy.

The European competitiveness gap is not due to a lack of scientific excellence, but rather to a regulatory system that is no longer fit-for-purpose and fails to keep pace with technological advances. Addressing this requires not only regulatory improvement, but a concerted and urgent effort to create a more predictable, proportionate, and innovation-enabling framework that retains talent, supports scale-up, and ensures Europe remains a credible global player in biosolutions.

These high-level conclusions reflect a clear message from participants: Europe must modernise GMO regulation through closer UK–EU collaboration if it is to remain competitive in biotechnology and biosolutions.

Call to action & further information

The upcoming Biotech Act II is an important milestone in unlocking biosolutions for the European bioeconomy. We need a bold Act that transitions Europe towards a more proportionate, science-based regulatory approach to GMO, by moving from authorisation to notification and establishing a cross-European regulatory sandbox on GMO. Implementing a bold new Act at pace will be vital to secure Europe's global competitiveness in innovative biosolutions.

Position paper on the upcoming Biotech Act II - EU Bio Coalition

About the BIA

The BioIndustry Association (BIA) is the voice of the innovative life sciences and biotech industry, enabling and connecting the UK ecosystem so that businesses can start, grow and deliver world-changing innovation. With over 600 members spanning human health and non-health biotech, including start-ups, scale-ups and established global companies, our membership encompasses the full UK ecosystem, including non-commercial research institutions and service providers. BIA is a member of the International Council for Biotechnology Associations (ICBA), Europabio and the European Biosolutions Coalition.

About the EBC

The European Biosolutions Coalition (EBC) consists of leading industry organizations representing a significant share of Europe's biosolutions companies. Biosolutions are nature's own tools, and they offer a powerful pathway to accelerate the transition towards a sustainable, resilient, and competitive future. Our mission is to elevate biosolutions on the European agenda, ensuring the sector plays a central role in driving the green transition and strengthening Europe's resilience. We advocate better conditions and opportunities to unlock innovation, accelerate the shift toward a climate-neutral economy, and enhance Europe's global competitiveness in a rapidly changing world. The Coalition is supported by the Novo Nordisk Foundation and Danish Industry.

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