



### ... Meetings

March was full to the brim with various meetings and events, catch up this month with the latest reports from Monogram 2026, Voice of the Future and more from page 8.



### ... Medals

Nominations are now open for the inaugural 2026 AAB President's Medals in Plant Sciences, Sustainable Futures and Accessibility in Applied Biology.

Find out more on page 2.



### ... & More Meetings!

Registration is open for Photosynthesis 2026, the International Symposium on Rice Functional Genomics, Auxin 2026 and the AAB President's Meeting on Sustainable Crop Nutrition.

With abstract deadlines fast approaching, don't miss out- check out our upcoming events page from page 4.



## Contents

AAB News.....	2
Upcoming AAB Events.....	4
Events in our Community.....	6
Community News.....	6
Career Development Opportunities.....	7
Meeting Reports - Voice of the Future 2026.....	8
Meeting Reports - Monogram 2026.....	10
Meeting Reports - Food Systems Catalyst.....	14
Update from the Annals of Applied Biology.....	16
Membership.....	18
AAB Specialist Groups.....	19
AAB Council.....	20
AAB Office.....	21
Contact Us.....	21



# AAB News

*March was jam-packed here at the AAB! With multiple meetings in London - including AAB council meeting, Voice of the Future at the Houses of Parliament & the Multidisciplinary Food Systems Catalyst - as well as Monogram 2026 in Cambridge the last week, it's safe to say the AAB team are all looking forward to a nice restful bank holiday weekend to start off April!*

## Monogram

This year for the first time we joined up officially with the Monogram Network, welcoming them into the AAB family as an associate specialist group to help organise their annual conference going forward. A lot of pressure then for the AAB to make a good impression with Monogram 2026!

With a record 180 in-person delegates this year, the four-day programme kicked off on the 23rd March with an ECR workshop hosted at Niab by Nikki Walter (University of Nottingham) and Joshua Ham (RAGT). An excellent way for our early-career attendees to break the ice and ease into a week of science in a more relaxed setting, the day consisted of a hands-on crop breeding workshop, panel discussions and plenty of networking - you can read more in Nikki's report on page 10.

With the rest of the Monogram community descending en masse to Robinson College, University of Cambridge, on the 24th for the main event: we were treated to three days of excellent talks, poster sessions and networking over nouvelle cuisine! And not forgetting an insightful women in crop science discussion session with Dame Ottoline Leyser. It truly was a whirlwind. Read what our ECR travel awardees had to say from page 10.

We'd like to extend a big thank you to the Monogram steering committee, local organisers Stéphanie Swarbreck and Kostya Kanyuka (Niab) and the wonderful staff at Robinson College for all their help in pulling together such a wonderful meeting. We look forward to welcoming everyone to Nottingham next Spring for Monogram 2027!

## Voice of the Future

We were very proud to be able to support five of our early-career members in attending Voice of the Future 2026 at the Houses of Parliament on the 19th March. This fantastic opportunity to question senior government officers and parliamentarians on current UK science policy is hosted each year by the Royal Society of Biology.

This year the AAB delegation met with Jordan from the AAB team, joining members of 13 other scientific societies to question a truly expert panel featuring Vicki Heath (Chief Healthcare Science Officer for Wales), Catherine Ross (Chief Scientific Officer for Scotland), The Viscount Stansgate (House of Lords Numeracy Select Committee member), Lauren Sullivan MP (Chair of the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology Board) and Emily Darlington MP (Science, Innovation and Technology Select Committee member).

Representing the AAB collective early-career voice, Dr Mollie Langdon asked what steps the government are taking to ensure long-term stable funding for applied biological research in priority areas such as climate resilience, plant health and sustainable crop production. Mollie perfectly highlighted the recent cuts to plant science courses in UK higher education as a fundamental disconnect between the government strategy to invest in future food security, and the need to cultivate and retain talented scientists who will drive future innovation. Continuing into the networking portion of the event, this sparked thoughtful discussion over the importance of supporting both research and education across all sciences.

You can read more about the event in our ECP meeting reports from page 8.



*Sunny visit to the UK Houses of Parliament for VOF2026 where early-career scientists had the opportunity to formally question panels of parliamentarians on science policy (pictured right- photo credit RSB)*

## Nominations

Last month we announced that Council have approved three brand-new President's Medals in Plant Sciences, Sustainable Futures and Accessibility in Applied Biology! Celebrating excellence, impact and leadership across applied biology - these medals are a fantastic opportunity for awardees to achieve recognition for the excellent work they are doing in their fields and the wider community.

Please consider nominating your colleagues; we're happy to say that nominations open to all - regardless of whether or not the nominee is an AAB member! Please visit our website to find out more, nominations are open until 31st May.

# AAB PRESIDENT'S MEDALS

Celebrating excellence, impact and leadership across applied biology

## Nominations open until 31<sup>st</sup> May

### Plant Science Medal


Celebrating research excellence among emerging researchers in applied plant biology.

### Sustainable Futures Medal


For excellence in implementation or development of sustainable practices in agriculture, horticulture, forestry and land management.

### Accessibility in Applied Biology Medal

For promotion of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion within the Applied Biology Community.



**Find out more**



[aab.org.uk/aab-presidents-medal/](https://aab.org.uk/aab-presidents-medal/)

# Upcoming AAB Events

## Webinar 'all about' Plant Gene Editing

*21st April, 11am BST*



The AAB PlantEd specialist group is launching a brand new webinar series on plant gene editing to run alongside our regular monthly webinar series 'all about' plant sciences and sustainable agriculture. The first of this new series launches this month with talks from Tien Vu Van (Gyeongsang National University) and Natasha Brock (Rothamsted Research).

**Register for free**

## Acrylamide in Cereal Products: Progress and Prospects

*3-4th June 2026, Palermo Italy*

Addressing the latest research and prospects for reducing acrylamide in food from breeding, farming practices, food processing and beyond. We are happy to announce that we are organising the second conference for the ACRYRED COST Action CA21149 as the project comes to an end this year.

**Abstract submission closes 15th April**



## International Conference on Photosynthesis Research (ICPR26)

*26-30th July 2026, Liverpool UK*



We are delighted to bring ICPR2026 to Liverpool in the UK. Tailoring photosynthesis to meet the needs of nature-based solutions to climate change and to the sustainability of food production remain global challenges that have to be addressed by the photosynthesis community. This meeting will galvanise participants from academia and industry to translate this new mechanistic understanding of photosynthetic function into improved crop production and more efficient terrestrial carbon sinks. With Keynotes from Danielle Way (Australian National University) and Nobel Laureate David Baker and Nathan Ennist (University of Washington, USA). ICPR26 will be our biggest event to date, featuring more than 20 concurrent sessions and 9 plenaries.

**Register now! Abstract submission & early-bird registration extended until 10th April**

## International Symposium on Rice Functional Genomics (ISRF2026)

*8-10th September 2026, London UK*

We are pleased to announce that we will be hosting the 23rd International Symposium on Rice Functional Genomics in the UK for the first time next year at the prestigious Royal Society of London, bringing together a global community of rice researchers. This year's theme is 'fundamental science for climate resilient rice' - featuring talks from invited speakers Ashwani Pareek, Sneh Pareek, Rod Wing, Jitender Giri, Qifa Zhang, Xuwei Chen, Emmanuel Guiderdoni, Nelson Saibo, Adam Price, Amelia Henry, Siwaret Arikat, Nguyen Thi Lang & more.

We're just finalising plans for LMIC travel awards - so watch this space if you'd like to join us!

**Register now! Submit your abstracts by 15th May**



## Auxin 2026

4-8th October 2026, Albufeira, Portugal

We are delighted to announce that the Auxin2026 meeting will take place in the Algarve next year. This quadrennial event brings together leading and emerging researchers in auxin biology to discuss the current state and future prospects for this exciting and fast moving research area! With 27 invited speakers from around the world, don't miss out!

**Registration now open - submit your abstract by 30th April**



## ECPro 2026 - Career Essentials for Applied Biologists

19-20th October, Nottingham UK

Save the date - the ECPro group will be hosting their first conference this October, focussing on communication and career development for early career applied biologists. With talks, panel discussions, workshops and plenty of opportunities to network with fellow early career professionals across academia and industry - a full programme will be announced soon. Watch this space and save the date!

## Advances in Integrated Pest and Pathogen Management - IPPM26

3-4th November, Leicester UK

IPPM26 will be returning to Leicester by popular demand. Save the date - further details to be announced soon.

## Sustainable Crop Nutrition - AAB President's Meeting

17-18th November, York UK

Join us as we address global issues in sustainable crop nutrition, bridging fertilizer use, soil health and plant uptake of nutrients essential to human health. The AAB President's Meeting is a biennial celebration of the research interests of the current AAB President - Professor Dale Sanders FRS. The programme will feature talks from submitted abstracts and invited speakers: Stephanie Swarbreck (Niab), Ute Kraemer (University of Bochum) and Tim Mauchline (Rothamsted Research) and award talks from the 2026 AAB President's Medallists (for which nominations are currently open until 31st May)



**Register now**

## Advances in Nematology 2026

10th December, London UK

Advances in Nematology will be hosted at the Linnean Society of London again on 10th December 2026. Watch this space for further information later in the year.



## International Advances in Plant Virology - IAPV 2027

6-8th April 2027, Cambridge UK

Save the date - the biennial IAPV will be hosted next April in Cambridge. Design the conference logo for your chance to win free registration. Send your design to [jordan@aab.org.uk](mailto:jordan@aab.org.uk) by 1st May 2026.

**Logo competition closes 1st May**

# Events in our Community

## ASPB Webinar - Diverse Journeys, Shared Purpose: Building the Next Generation of Plant Scientists

9th April, Online, 7pm BST

Are you considering a future in academia, but unsure which path is right for you? Join the ASPB's Women in Plant Biology committee for an engaging webinar featuring plant scientists sharing practical, real-world insights into building a productive and fulfilling academic career. Our speakers will discuss navigating the academic job market, establishing research programs, balancing teaching and scholarship, obtaining funding, mentoring students, and sustaining long-term career success. You'll hear first hand perspectives of opportunities and challenges unique to the two different academic environments - featuring Amanda Storm and Adrienne Roeder. [Register now](#)



## BIFoR Annual Meeting 2026

22 -23rd July, Birmingham, UK

Join the BIFoR project for their annual meeting - this year celebrating a decade of CO2 enrichment at BIFoR FACE.

Now accepting posters on all things forest research, to apply email [bifor@contacts.bham.ac.uk](mailto:bifor@contacts.bham.ac.uk)

[Submit your poster by May 22nd](#)

## Rank Prize Symposium - Hidden Hunger: from plant breeding to policy

7-10th September, Lake District, UK



RANK  
PRIZE

Applications are currently open to join the next Rank Prize symposium as an early-career speaker this September. To apply please send a CV and short statement of interest (max 1 page) to [helen.berrington@rankprize.org](mailto:helen.berrington@rankprize.org)

[Apply by 30th June](#)

# Community News

*Do you have something to share with our community? Opportunities, jobs, achievements... we'd love to hear about them. Get in touch with AAB Office!*

## Letterbox: Submit your ideas to guide AHDB Cereals & Oilseeds activity

AHDB provide independent evidence to help levy payers navigate the many challenges of farming. Their new



Letterbox is your opportunity to tell them what you need to know. Whether it's a knowledge gap, a practical challenge, or a long-term concern – your questions and ideas will guide what AHDB do next. [Find out more.](#)



## Community Call for Action: Wheat Genomics Web Services

The [Delivering Sustainable Wheat](#) Project - including researchers at the John Innes Centre, Earlham Institute, University of Bristol and Rothamsted Research - are reviewing resources and web services for the UK wheat scientific community, with the aim of a coordinated funding application to update existing tools, implement missing tools and provide better connection and training throughout the resource. Have your say at [wheat-tools.jic.ac.uk](http://wheat-tools.jic.ac.uk).

# Career Development Opportunities

## Nature Awards Inspiring Women in Science

Are you committed to advancing gender equality in STEM? Are you dedicated to encouraging girls and young women to engage with STEM subjects and pursue careers in science?

We are looking to celebrate and support the achievements of women in science and those who inspire the next generation of female scientists around the world.

Two winners will be awarded US\$50,000, and two runners up will receive US\$5,000, and an invitation to an award ceremony in London or New York, with accommodation and travel expenses covered. [Apply by 8th April.](#)



## Monogram ECR General Travel Award

Open to all members of the Monogram community from academia or industry, early-career travel awards of up to £500 are now available to support travel to workshops, training or visits to collaborators. To apply for funding send your CV and proposal letter (1 page max) to [MonogramNetworkUK@gmail.com](mailto:MonogramNetworkUK@gmail.com) by 31st May.

## COB Travelling Fellowships

Three of The Company of Biologists' journals – Development, Journal of Cell Science and Journal of Experimental Biology – offer Travelling Fellowships of up to £3,000 to graduate students and post-doctoral researchers wishing to make collaborative visits to other laboratories. These are designed to offset the cost of travel/accommodation and other related expenses. There is no restriction on nationality. [Next application deadline is 1st May.](#)



## Plant Health Undergraduate Studentships (PHUGS)

Applications are now open to undergraduates to apply for this year's PHUGS scheme. Undergraduate students can now apply to work on these projects for 8-10 weeks this summer (generally between June-September.) Successful students will be awarded £4,120 for the studentship and gain real-life research experience. This year 16 projects are available: 2 of which are sponsored by the AAB. Please share this excellent opportunity among your UG network. [Find out more and apply by 28th April.](#)





# Meeting Reports - Voice of the Future 2026

*We were very proud to support five of our early-career members (coincidentally all women in science!) to attend the 2026 Voice of the Future event at the Houses of Parliament. Organised by the Royal Society of Biology, this fantastic event gave our ECRs the chance to question parliamentarians on current UK science policy.*

## Dr Mollie Langdon Rothamsted Research, UK

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On Thursday 19th March 2026, I was extremely grateful to be selected to speak at the prestigious 'Voice of the Future 2026' event, hosted by the Royal Society of Biology held at the Houses of Parliament! I was selected as the representative for the Association of Applied Biologists (AAB), and I sat alongside representatives from 13 other scientific societies to question parliamentarians and senior government officials about science policies in the UK.

I was interested in the future of funding for plant science research, and I specifically asked, "what steps are the UK Government taking to ensure long term stable funding for applied biological research, particularly in areas critical to national priorities, such as climate resilience, plant health, and sustainable crop production".

Dr Lauren Sullivan MP (the Chair of the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology) answered my question, and we discussed the recent closures of several UK university plant science degree programmes, and how there is a clear disconnection between a deliberate cut in training for future generations of plant scientists, and the UK Government's investment in science. It was great to highlight that if the UK wants to maintain a robust and resilient food system in the face of climate challenges, we need to appropriately train the voices of the future and retain them (another point that was raised several times throughout the session).

I thoroughly enjoyed the event, and it was fantastic to listen to the views from the other invited speakers which also included Vicki Heath (Chief Healthcare Science Officer for Wales), Catherine Ross (Chief Scientific Officer for Scotland), The Viscount Stansgate (Numeracy for Life Committee member), and Emily Darlington MP (Science, Innovation and Technology Select Committee member). I left this year's 'Voice of the Future 2026' event feeling inspired and proud to be representing the future of UK plant science!

***"For me, one of the best things about this event was the chance to stand in the same room as parliamentarians and senior policy officials, look them in the eye, shake their hand, and network. This opportunity was invaluable – as the saying goes, it's often who you know, more than what you know."***



Last year, I attended the 'Voice of the Future 2025' virtual event as the online speaker representing AAB, where I asked MPs and Lords from their respective Science, Technology and Innovation Committees how early career researchers could get involved in policy decisions around genome edited crops. Whilst the 2025 online event was accessible to everyone around the country, what it lacked was this in-person element to build connections.

This year, I had the chance to meet other friendly representatives from AAB over coffee, I had the chance to chat with other motivated early career researchers from different Universities and research institutes over drinks and nibbles, and I had the chance to speak one-on-one with an interested MP on what I am passionate about.

And so, my advice would be to attend in-person events wherever possible and make the most of different opportunities to form connections and widen your network of contacts. It's not every day that you get to visit and speak in the Houses of Parliament after all!

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to extend my thanks to the Association of Applied Biologists for selecting my question and inviting me to speak at the event. I would also like to thank the Royal Society of Biology for hosting a brilliant afternoon, particularly to Lucy Eckersley for the excellent organisation and Susie Rabin for chairing the sessions.

## **Gina Vong**

**University of York, UK**

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I was honoured to have been invited to attend Voices of the Future 2026, along with other early career members of AAB. It was interesting to learn from policymakers about their thoughts and priorities for the future of UK science, such as the need for longterm research funding, building public trust in science and the need for easier commercialisation of innovations.

However, what struck me was that the MPs were very keen to hear from us ECRs. When AAB representative Dr Mollie Langdon asked a question about the [UK government food strategy](#) and the need for longterm funding for research in plant health and crop production, MP Lauren Sullivan wanted to hear more from us about how we felt. Later, during the networking session, we were able to catch up with Lauren Sullivan MP to explain to her the disconnect between the UK food strategy and the lack of funding and training on the skills needed to execute this strategy.

Equally important as meeting parliamentarians was the opportunity to meet other ECRs. Meeting the AAB delegation gave me an appreciation for the breadth of applied biology and plant science research across the UK. We also met ECRs from other scientific disciplines, such as the British Ecological Society and the Royal Society of Biology. I really enjoyed learning about the research and methods from other subject areas.

***“Altogether, this event left me excited for the future of UK science. I have a better understanding of how government policy operates, and I feel energised to advocate for the issues I care about.”***



*Our early-career delegation including Dr Jordan Robson (AAB), networking with Dr Lauren Sullivan MP (Chair of the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology)*





# Meeting Reports - Monogram 2026

*The annual Monogram conference has long been an established event on the UK Cereals research calendar and last year the AAB were very happy to take over the logistics of organisation - bringing the Monogram Network under the AAB umbrella to ease some of the organisational pressures! Hosted this year at Robinson College, University of Cambridge, it was as ever a week of fantastic science and great chance to catch up with the community. Here's what three of our ECR travel awardees had to say...*

## Dr Nikki Walter

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One of the standout highlights was organising the Monogram 2026 ECR workshop. It was both a challenging and highly rewarding experience, offering a fantastic opportunity to network extensively while helping others to do the same. The strong ECR presence and sense of community carried through into the main conference, where it was especially rewarding to see ECRs actively participating through asking questions, engaging in discussions, and building connections. The workshop programme also provided valuable practical and career-focused training. This included a Breeders' Workshop session that encouraged ECRs to think about the real-world applications of their research and develop practical skills such as crossing, alongside a grant writing Q&A panel that offered a plethora of careers advice.

Another highlight was delivering my oral presentation on Biological Nitrogen Fixation. Developing an engaging story from complex results was challenging, but ultimately a brilliant learning experience. It reinforced the importance of presenting a focused story rather than attempting to include all data and nuances. The discussion that followed was particularly beneficial, with a range of questions, including some challenging ones, providing great experience in thinking critically and responding under pressure.

***"The Women in Wheat event led by Stéphanie Swarbreck with Dame Ottoline Leyser was inspiring and a lovely interval to the scientific talks."***

Ottoline is an exceptional and articulate speaker, and it was a privilege to hear her perspectives on the research landscape. I enjoyed hearing her thoughts on how the scientific research industry must evolve to become more effective and resilient, with an emphasis on inclusion and diversity. She gave some thought-provoking insights into the nuances of leadership, which I found particularly motivating.

I found this year's meeting to be both diverse and informative. I particularly enjoyed Tim Mauchline's talk on the crop microbiome, an area that has historically been underexplored but is becoming increasingly relevant in crop science. It was also refreshing to hear about a wider range of cereal crops beyond the major staples, including tef and millet.

I was encouraged to see the diversity of research being conducted across the UK and beyond, especially by up and coming scientists. The level of ECR engagement stood out through asking insightful questions, and networking throughout the conference, and many took on active roles through co-chairing sessions. Ultimately, this created an inclusive and vibrant atmosphere that was highly beneficial to the cereals community and also enjoyable.

### Acknowledgements

I would like to thank AAB particularly for financial support for my travel to and accommodation while at the conference.



*Nikki presenting her project at Monogram 2026 (TL), the Women in Crop Science and Allies Discussion featuring Dr Stéphanie Swarbreck and Dame Ottoline Leyser (TR), the Breeding Workshop (BL) and Grant Writing Panel (BR) at the early-career workshop.*

# Dr Crispus M. Mbaluto

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Stepping into the Monogram Network meeting for the first time was like entering the heart of UK's Cereal and Grasses research community. Although I have been involved in cereal research since 2021, I had never attended a Monogram meeting! I knew it was a niche but influential meeting, especially for the Early Career Researcher (ECRs) – yet experiencing it first hand was an eye-opener.

The 2026 Monogram edition, organised in collaboration with Association of Applied Biologist (AAB), was exceptionally well-structured, with seamless program spanning through all sessions. From the opening session, I was struck by the depth of research being presented. The level of details offered a clear sense of the past and current direction of cereal research. Although the volume of information was immense and delivered within tight time-frames, it still helped me position my own work within broader cereal research trajectories – ranging from physiology, genetic to bioinformatics and plant breeding.

Beyond the science, the meeting offered great environment for networking. I enjoyed conversations with peers (including established academics to enthusiastic ECRs) across career stages. The community spirit was also evident echoing previous attendee's words that Monogram is a place where mentoring, talks and poster discussion, and peer engagement happens organically. I had a chance to reconnect with old colleagues, friends and exchange ideas that I hope will grow into future partnerships.

As a new entrant to cereal research, I found the meeting both informative and enriching. Sessions were well-integrated, and the presenters provided both technical and conceptual foundations that underpinned the diverse research studies showcased.

**“Overall, I found Monogram intellectually stimulating: it broadened my research horizons and reinforced the value of community in research. I left inspired to contribute actively to this vibrant network”**

## Key highlights

- ◆ Insightful and forward looking presentations clearly outlining various research programs, strategic direction offering a strong sense of how monogram community is shaping cereal and grasses research.
- ◆ Networking opportunities with peers and colleagues and learning about their current projects highlighting potential areas for mutual benefits.
- ◆ Reconnection and community, from meeting old friends to building new professional relationship that made the experience personal useful. I had a chance to meet old friends as well as new ones and catch up.

## Acknowledgements

I extend my appreciation to the Monogram Science Team for selecting my abstract for oral presentation, and to the AAB Travel Grant Program for financial support for my travel and accommodation. I am grateful to Dr. Pallavi Singh of University of Essex for the opportunity to work in her research group and allowing me to present our work at Monogram. Lastly, my thanks goes to the AAB Team Dr. Geraint Parry and Dr. Jordan Robson of the AAB Team for organising a seamless and enjoyable meeting. All these efforts contributed to a productive and enjoyable experience



*Crispus (M) with potential new collaborators Bernice Waweru (L) & Sibongile Zimba (R)*

# Yao Fu

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Attending the Monogram 2026 conference was a highly valuable and rewarding academic experience. As a PhD student, I felt privileged to participate in such an important meeting that brings together researchers in cereal science, and to engage with scholars from different universities and research institutions. These interactions were particularly meaningful in broadening my academic perspective.

The conference covered a wide range of key topics in cereal research, including biotic stress and plant defence, root microbiome interactions, crop quality and nutrition, climate resilience, developmental regulation, and precision agriculture. The sessions not only presented the latest research advances but also highlighted the strong integration between fundamental research and practical applications. For example, in the session on crop quality and nutrition, various speakers demonstrated strategies to improve grain quality through genetic approaches. Meanwhile, talks on plant physiology and environmental adaptation emphasised the importance of enhancing crop stability under climate change. In addition, presentations on high-throughput phenotyping and trait measurement further illustrated the critical role of modern technologies in crop research.

Through attending these talks, I gained a deeper understanding of current advances in cereal research and gradually developed a more integrated view of the connections between different research areas. By comparing and synthesising insights from multiple sessions, I became more aware of how research is increasingly integrated across scales—from molecular mechanisms to phenotypic traits and ultimately to agricultural applications. This experience not only broadened my academic perspective but also provided new ways of thinking about complex research questions. Furthermore, the methodologies and approaches presented, such as high-throughput data analysis, multi-scale phenotyping, and interdisciplinary integration, offered valuable inspiration. These insights highlighted the importance of adopting multi-dimensional approaches when addressing complex agricultural challenges, rather than relying on a single research perspective.

In addition to the scientific sessions, the opportunities for interaction were equally valuable. I presented my poster during the conference and engaged in discussions with researchers from diverse backgrounds. Although my research focuses on barley biotic stress and this topic was less represented at the meeting, these discussions exposed me to a wide range of perspectives and related research areas that I had not previously considered. This helped me develop a more comprehensive understanding of the field. Moreover, these interactions allowed me to connect with researchers at different career stages, including fellow early career researchers and more experienced experts. The overall atmosphere was friendly and open, which made me feel increasingly confident and comfortable in engaging in academic discussions.

***“As a PhD student, I initially found it challenging to engage with more experienced researchers and process a large amount of information, but this experience helped build my confidence and improve my academic communication skills.”***

Overall, this conference experience significantly broadened my academic horizons and deepened my understanding of current trends in cereal science. It has provided valuable insights for my PhD research and laid a strong foundation for my future academic development.

## ***Acknowledgements***

I would like to thank the AAB for providing the travel grant that made my attendance possible. I appreciate the support and guidance from my supervisor Dr. Jorunn Bos, Dr. Joanne Russell, and also thank Dr. Miriam Schreiber for her valuable advice and assistance on my PhD project.



# Meeting Reports - Multidisciplinary Food Systems Catalyst

*Our Executive Officer Geraint had the honour last month of attending the final presentations day for the recent [Multidisciplinary Food Systems Catalyst Programme](#). A new concept, funded by the UKRI and led by Zinc VC, the project brought together multidisciplinary teams in six month programme aiming to translate research into impactful and sustainable enterprises.*

I was delighted to attend a presentation day for the 'Multidisciplinary Food Systems Catalyst' - a unique scheme (to me at least), funded by UKRI and managed by the Zinc VC company. The scheme piqued my interest through one of its participants: Dr Lindsay Williams who is a researcher at the University of Edinburgh, and a member of the [AAB Horticultural Quality and Food Loss](#) group.

The Multidisciplinary Food Systems Catalyst brought together academics to translate their research into commercial solutions for a healthier, more resilient food system, with the ultimate aim of obtaining investor funding. One unusual aspect of the scheme was that it was essential that each project included a cross-disciplinary team of academics. The participants in the ten-funded projects received training on how to effectively promote of their ideas and how to work in cross-disciplinary teams.

The event was held in Vauxhall in South London in the [Mission Kitchen](#) at New Covent Garden Market. Mission Kitchen is a community project that provides commercial kitchen space for start-up companies. Delegates walked through the communal kitchen and work-space, which was filled with an exciting array of tasting menus and product designs!

The day was split into two sections with the first hour comprising of higher-level talks from representatives from the Bramble VC company, the [Bezos Centre for Sustainable Protein](#) at Imperial College and a panel discussion with investors, innovators and academics.

Professor Monika Zurek (University of Oxford) gave a passionate plea for more funding in research that aims to understand why people make food choices. Highlighting that all the innovation in the world won't help if we don't understand why people make food choices and how food prices should be matched to the ambition of innovation.

The second part of the day saw the ten projects make 5-minute pitches to convince investors about the potential of their idea. These projects were an interesting mix of conventional academic research and grown-up iGEM! The pitches promoted a wide variety of projects, which ranged from proposals to improve school and family diets through to proposing the use of novel breeding technologies to improve vegetable shelf life.

The last project was expertly presented by Lindsay Williams in which she explained the idea to link novel 'post-harvest' and 'shelf-life' genes in Brassica varieties in order to extend post-harvest shelf life. Although the technology remains in development, it is a clear demonstration of the potential for GM and GE approaches to impact across the crop supply chains; from farmer to supermarket shelves. Partnering with Dr Bethan Mead, from the University of Liverpool's Department of Psychology's Appetite and Obesity Research Group, Lindsay's project drove home the fact that the best technology is useless if we don't understand what and why people will buy at Aldi or Waitrose.

Other projects close to 'AAB-interests' included a project that was developing soil nitrogen sensors for smart-fertiliser application and project that has developed improved heat-pump technology to facilitate the heat exchange between greenhouses and vertical farms - this team including Dr Daphne Ezer (University of York) who provided a plenary talk at AAB-organised ICAR2025 in Ghent.

The day ended with a delicious lunch catered by one of the Mission Kitchen tenants and included the Venison burgers proposed by the FEED project (although I'm not yet convinced that use of wild deer will solve quality issues with school lunches).

This significantly over-subscribed scheme was an innovative approach that brought together cross-disciplinary academics with potential investors. The ultimate challenge will be to bring these proposed technologies to the public at a price they will pay. It might be interesting for this type of project to link with those supported by the [UKRI Transforming UK Food Systems Strategic Priorities Fund](#). We look forward to learning about the successes of these projects and whether the scheme will be repeated across other subject areas.

### The 2026 Cohort:

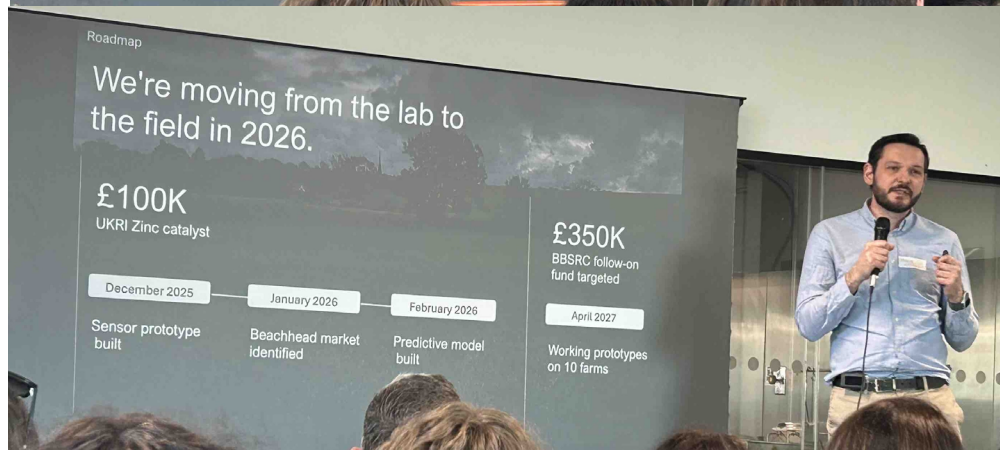


#### Post-Harvest Brassicas (pictured top)

Harvest-inducible gene expression that extends brassica shelf life - activating only after picking, leaving field performance untouched.

#### LDW Technologies (pictured bottom)

A platform that integrates soil nutrient measurements with decision making software to support farmers in premium grain markets.



#### StackFlow

Recovering waste heat from vertical farms to cut greenhouse heating costs - making domestic protected growing viable again.

#### Yumfull

Meal and activity kits helping parents introduce new foods to young children - tackling the ultra-processed habit before it forms.

#### Carowia

Microbial fermentation of  $\beta$ -carotene - a scalable, year-round alternative to land-intensive extraction, building UK resilience in functional nutrition ingredients.

#### Seaweed Plant Pots

Biodegradable plant pots moulded from seaweed processing waste - replacing 500 million non-recyclable plastic pots produced in the UK each year.

#### Seasage

A new product category turning underused UK bycatch into a convenient, nutritious sausage - making sustainable seafood mainstream.

#### PRINTFOODSUK

3D-printed, micronutrient-loaded texture-modified meals for care home residents with dysphagia - restoring dignity to every plate.

#### Sylvaguard

Feed additives extracted from UK sawmill bark waste, proven to cut livestock parasite burden by 50% - a circular answer to collapsing antiparasitic drug efficacy.

#### FEED

Nutritionally optimised hybrid products blending UK pulses, vegetables and wild venison - designed for schools.

# Update from the Annals of Applied Biology

## Call for Papers: RECROP: Plant Adaptations to Extreme Environments

**Submission Deadline: extended to 1st June 2026**

This Special Issue invites high-quality research and review articles that address strategies for crop adaptation to climate change. We particularly welcome studies on innovative breeding approaches, molecular and genomic mechanisms of stress tolerance, biotechnological solutions, and integrated agronomic practices. Contributions that bridge laboratory, field, and modeling approaches to improve crop performance and yield stability are highly encouraged. By highlighting cutting-edge solutions and practical strategies, this Special Issue aims to advance climate-resilient agriculture and inspire new approaches that ensure global food security under changing environmental conditions.

### **Topics for this call for papers include but are not restricted to:**

- ◆ Drought tolerance mechanisms in crops and wild species
- ◆ Molecular and physiological responses to high salinity
- ◆ Heat stress signaling and tolerance in plants
- ◆ Root architecture adaptations to water-limited environments
- ◆ Genomic and transcriptomic insights into stress responses
- ◆ Gene editing approaches in stress adaptation
- ◆ Plant-microbe interactions in extreme environments
- ◆ Epigenetic regulation of abiotic stress tolerance
- ◆ Functional traits and phenotyping for stress-resilient crops

### **Guest Editors:**

*Prof. Musa Kavas & Prof. Kubilay Yildirim-  
Ondokuz Mayıs University*

**Annals of Applied Biology**  
**Biosciences for Sustainability**



## **Special Issue: Call for Papers**

RECROP: Plant Adaptations  
to Extreme Environments

**Submission Deadline:**  
**31 March 2026**



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## Call for Papers:

### Roots to Regenerative Agriculture: Soils, Biodiversity and Novel Approaches

**Submission deadline: extended to 1st June 2026**

The concept of Regenerative Agriculture is successfully engaging the agricultural community, food industry and policy makers to consider how to utilise agricultural land to maximise the delivery of ecosystem services.

Regenerative practices are intended to mimic natural processes in order to deliver, productive and healthy ecosystems, enhance soil health, minimise environmental impacts, enrich social value, increase carbon sequestration and improve resilience to climate, water availability (flood and drought).

Root systems, the rhizosphere (the soil around the roots) and soil biota are increasingly topics of conversation and research in regenerative agriculture. Regenerative practices focus on building 'healthy and functional' soils, which are full of biological life. Understanding how these micro- and macro-organisms interact with each other and plants via their root systems and in turn how these are affected by different agricultural practices and stresses (e.g. waterlogging or drought) is an important part of meeting the global challenges of food security, biodiversity loss and climate change.

This Special Issue aims to bring together submissions that explore the evidence for the novel approaches in regenerative agriculture and agroecology. The SI is organised to coincide with the Roots to Regenerative Agriculture conference organised in York, November 18-20 2025.

***Topics for this call for papers include but are not restricted to:***

- ◆ Regenerative Agriculture
- ◆ Agroecology
- ◆ Soil Health
- ◆ Soil Biodiversity
- ◆ Inter-cropping
- ◆ Root Systems and Rhizosphere

#### ***Guest Editors:***

*Dr. Charlotte White - RSK ADAS Ltd*  
*Dr. Mark Hodson - University of York*

**Annals of Applied Biology**  
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## **Special Issue: Call for Papers**

Roots to Regenerative  
Agriculture: Soils, Biodiversity  
and Novel Approaches

**Submission Deadline:**  
**1 April 2026**



WILEY

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*As a member of the Association of Applied Biologists, you join a community of over 1000 professionals working across all areas of Applied Biology to improve agricultural productivity, with added benefits...*

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- ◆ Priority access to Early Career travel grants for all AAB events (£500)
- ◆ \*New\* access to members-only Early Career travel grants for external conferences (£500)

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- ◆ 30% off Aspects of Applied Biology
- ◆ 10% discount in publication fees for Plant Biotechnology Journal
- ◆ 10% referral & renewal discount on membership



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**PlantEd: Genome Editing in Plants**



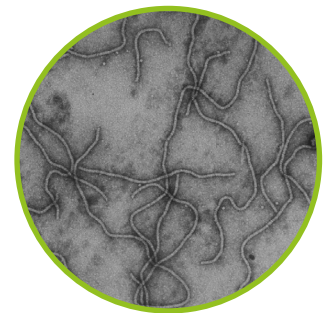
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