

Maize, Politics & Innovation



Dr Julian Little FRSB
MGA Conference
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Who was I?

Spent over 30 years in “Bayer” in the UK and France

- Scientist
- Science Communicator
- Government Affairs



Who am I now?

I now run my own consultancy helping individuals, companies and organisations:

- Public & Government Affairs
- Communications
- Change Management
- Mentoring & Training



My Experience of Maize – 1989-2000 – Research



My Experience of Maize – 2000-2005 – GM Field Trials



Non-GM Half of the field



GM Half of the field



GM Maize undersown with Rye Grass - Agronomy



My Experience of Maize – 2023 – A Problem of Bird Repellent Seed Treatments



- The threat of losing seed treatments such as Korit, Force and Redigo as a result of the end of Brexit Transition Arrangements.
- Averted by the whole industry coming together and annoying the Government into action.

The Plan



Result

- Farming Minister Mark Spencer MP announces that a “solution will be found” at Cereals in June
- At a subsequent roundtable with industry and NFU, he agrees to two actions:
 - ✓ To push back the transition time a few years (required Parliamentary approval)
 - ✓ To fast track Emergency Authorisations for Korit, Redigo and Force (to give seed companies time to order seed for 2024)





Update

- It seems likely that we will lose Korit as our frontline bird repellent seed treatments but perhaps not before the new UK arrangements lapse (2027)
- A number of new products in the pipeline from different companies:
 - ✓ Ecovelex from Eden Research (with Corteva)
 - ✓ New Bayer product based on black pepper
 - ✓ New product from Kwizda (the makers of Korit)
- Race to get them registered in the UK before 2027.

My Experience of Maize – 2023-2025 – Future Biogas



- Focus on injection of biomethane from anaerobic digestion directly into the National Gas Grid.
- Subsidy-free, you can “sell green gas” to companies who are trying to meet their ESG requirements.
- They have an Agricultural Advisory Board to help them further green up the growing of maize as their preferred feedstock.



AstraZeneca inks £100m deal to source biomethane from Lincolnshire BECCS project

A Tiny Bit of Politics



A New Government = a new way of doing things?



- Huge majority in the Commons means you can do what you want and say what you want.



Traditional Lobbying



- In the olden days, you would seek to ~~bribe~~ influence an MP or Minister with clothes, a new hair-do, trips out or maybe the best seat at an event.
- Obviously you cannot do that now without people making a fuss.



Winning Friends and Influencing People



It is hard to not come to the conclusion that anyone who doesn't traditionally vote Labour is a target:

- Anyone over 65
- Farmers
- Anyone living near Heathrow

Less than 12 months after the landslide election, many new Labour MPs are fearing another Boris-like meltdown in public support.

“Food Security is National Security”



?



*'It's a school project.
I have to pull up this
mustard and cress
and install a solar farm'*



MATT



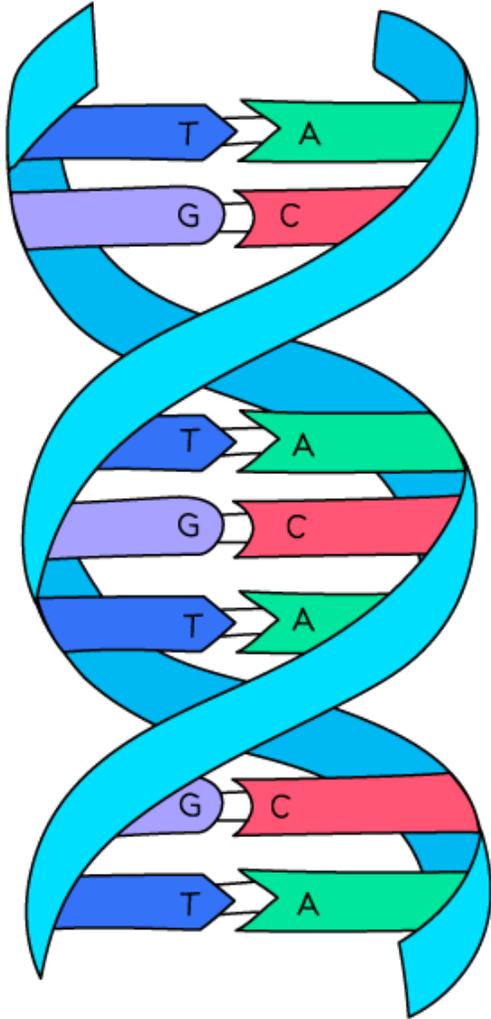
'A good guide to what happens next is to ask yourself how this could get any worse'





Gene-Edited Maize, anyone?

Genetic Modification vs Gene editing



1. GM Apple

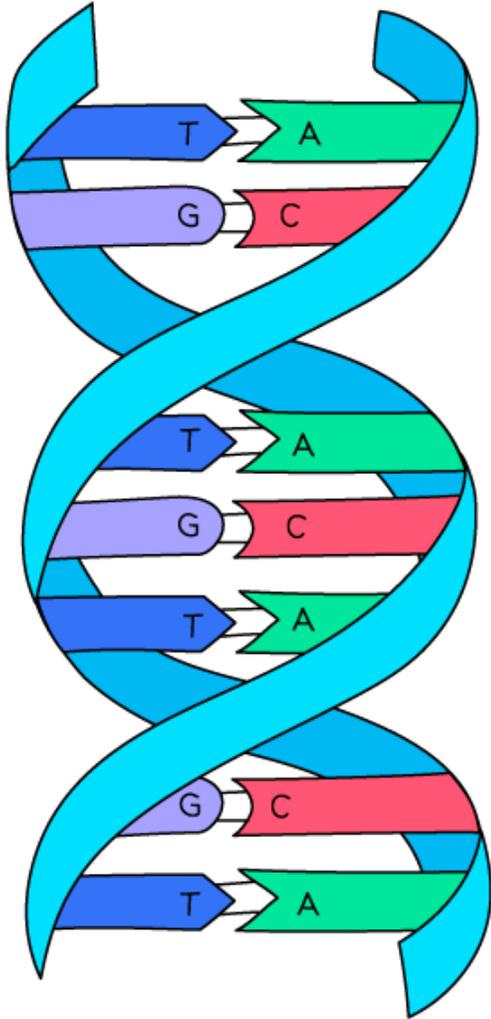
- Extra DNA
- You can test to see whether it is GM
- You can test for what gene they have inserted
- Traceability ✓



2. Gene-Edited Apple

- No extra DNA
- You **cannot** test to see whether it is gene-edited
- It is essentially identical to other apples
- Traceability ✗

Genetic Modification vs Gene editing



1. GM Apple

- Extra DNA
- You can test to see whether it is GM
- You can test for what gene they have inserted
- Traceability ✓



2. Gene-Edited Apple

- No extra DNA
- **You cannot test to see whether It is gene-edited** to other apples
- Traceability ✗

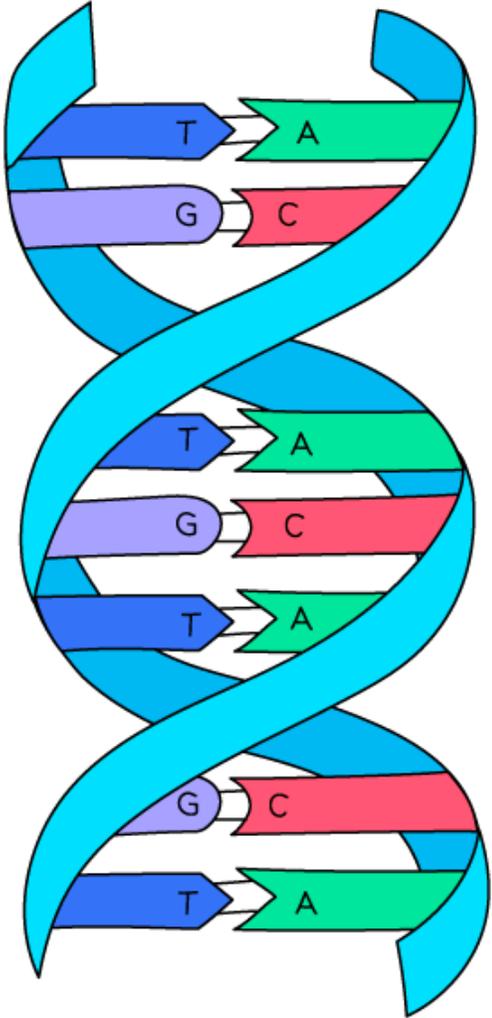
Genetic Technology (Precision Breeding) Act 2023



*"O.K., now, who ordered the glass half empty,
and who ordered the glass half full?"*



Gene editing versus Genetic Modification



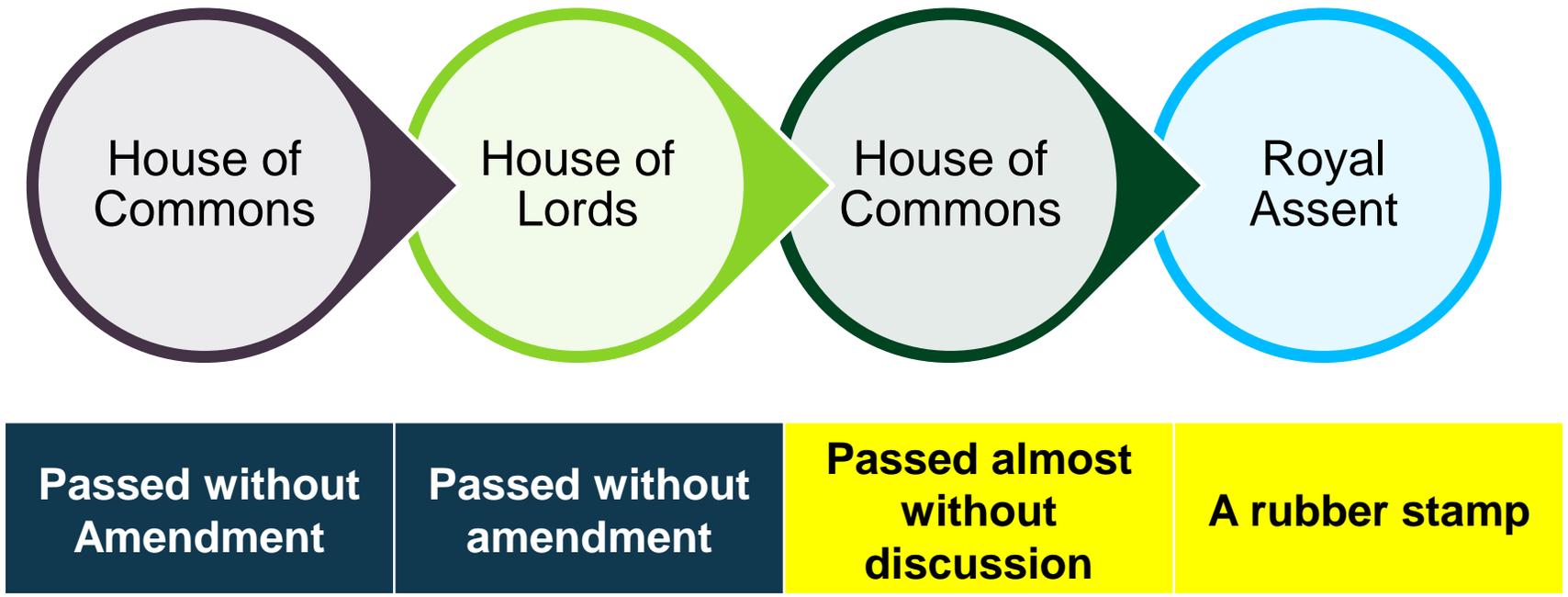
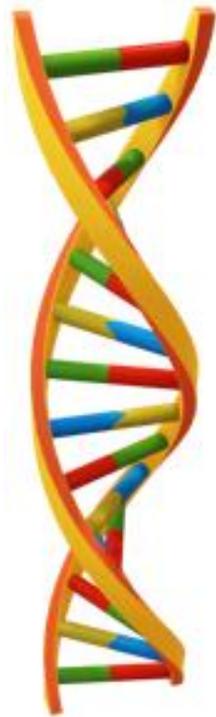
1. Introduce/replace DNA at a precise location

- Genetic Modification if the end point couldn't be achieved by traditional breeding (transgenics)
- Successfully introduced and working around the world except for the UK/ Europe

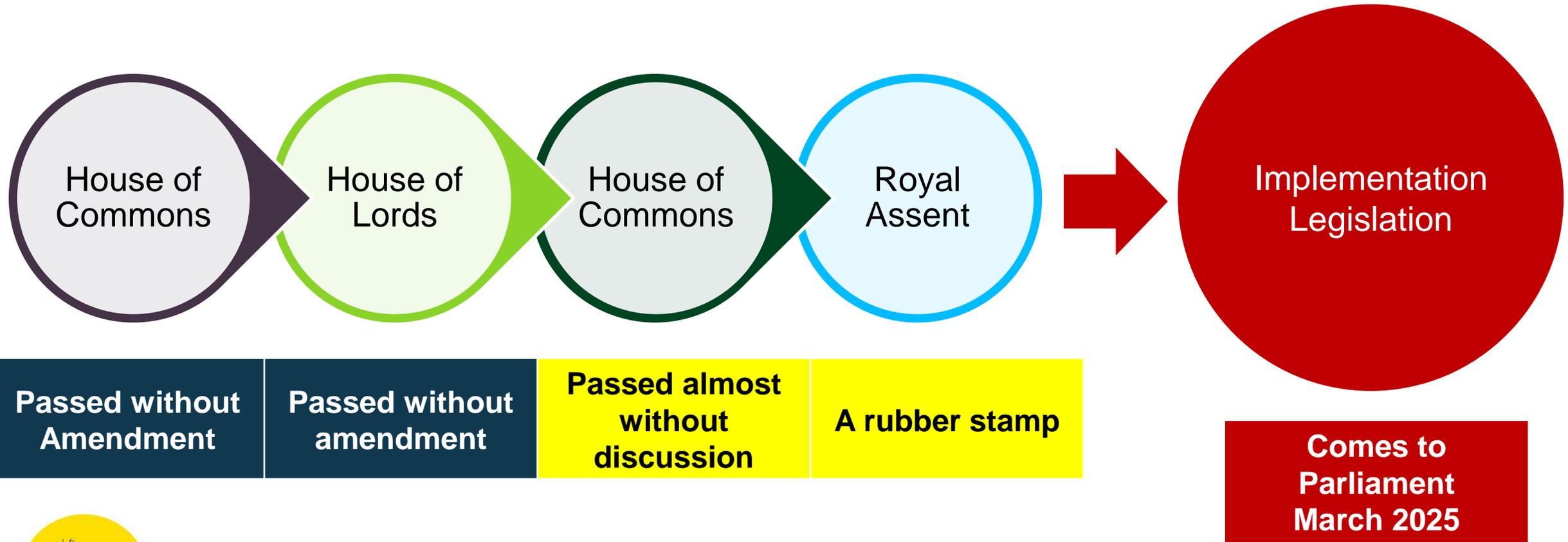
2. Delete/edit existing DNA

- Gene-editing or Precision Breeding since the endpoint *could* be achieved by traditional breeding
- **Now regulated differently to GM in England but not yet elsewhere in the UK or Europe**

Gene Editing - A UK Political Success Story - 2023



Gene Editing - A UK Political Success Story - 2025





What can Gene-Editing bring to the Maize Table?

- ✓ Increased yields – for examples, a change in leaf angles and width of leaves.
- ✓ Disease resistance – for example, Maize Lethal Necrosis.
- ✓ Drought tolerance – maximising the water window where the maximum yields can be achieved.
- ✓ Contamination – reduction in aflatoxin levels in animal feed (something GM maize varieties have been doing in Spain for 26 years).

Conclusions



- Maize is a subtropical crop with a big future in the UK.
- A lot of external factors are affecting food production, and many organisations & influencers seem intent on making food security worse.
- Lots of interest in maize from a research and use perspective.
- Somewhat bizarrely, the UK is ahead of the curve when it comes to gene-editing and we have some of the best science in the world in this area.
- That said, internal UK politics means that there may be delays in access.
- In the end, there will always be the policy issue....



“Politics is the art of looking for trouble, finding it everywhere, diagnosing it incorrectly and applying the wrong remedies.”

Groucho Marx





Thank you

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