

# BRITISH ONIONS

## BRITISH ONION PRODUCER ASSOCIATION AND RESEARCHERS UNITE TO TACKLE FUSARIUM

Bulb onions are the world's second biggest vegetable crop with an annual production of 100M tonnes. It is also one of the UK's most important crops with around 500K tonnes produced in 2022, with a value of £160M. However, Fusarium Basal Rot (FBR) poses a significant threat to the UK onion industry, causing devastating losses both pre- and post-harvest. Losses are driving onion growers out of business and, with climate change exacerbating the issue, innovative solutions are urgently needed.

In response, a groundbreaking research project has been launched by British Onions Producer Association (BOPA) spearheaded by a diverse team of experts spanning remote sensing, agronomy, and biology. The project, funded by Innovate UK under DEFRA's Farming Innovation Programme, aims to revolutionize FBR detection and control with a multifaceted approach. Through cutting-edge molecular diagnostics, agronomic insights, and advanced



technologies, the team aims to empower onion growers with the tools needed to combat FBR at every stage of production.

"FUSED: integrated fusarium early diagnostic and management" is a £1M, 24-month research project with a team consisting of British Onions Producer Association, innovative R&D company B-hive Innovations Ltd, G's Growers, Moulton Bulb Company, Stourgarden, Bedfordshire Growers and involving researchers from University of Warwick, RSK-ADAS, CHAP (Crop Health and Protection), VCS Agronomy and Allium & Brassica Centre.

"Together, we're pioneering new methods to assess FBR risk pre-planting, detect infected onions in the field and during harvest, and identify early signs of infection in storage," explains Dr Andy Gill, General Manager at B-hive Innovations and overall project lead. "Our goal is ambitious: to slash FBR prevalence by 50%, potentially saving millions in annual losses and enhancing the long-term sustainability of the industry."

"The UK onion industry is really struggling to combat FBR," said Tim Elcombe, Chairman of British Onions Producer Association, and from Bedfordshire Growers. "Crop losses can reach 40% and this costs the industry more than £10M a year. As a sector, we desperately need better detection and management solutions."

The impact of this research extends beyond financial gains, with potential benefits including reduced reliance on imports and improved environmental sustainability. By equipping growers with effective strategies to detect and combat FBR, this project represents a crucial step towards securing the future of the UK onion industry.

“The combination of research is superb,” said Sam Rix, British Onions Producer Association R&D Chairman and from Stourgarden. “The project focuses on every point in the onion growing process, from pre-planting molecular diagnostics through in-field imaging, to FBR detection in stores to smell infections at the earliest possible stages. This should equip onion producers with an amazing array of new technology.”

## ENDS

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British Onions Producer Association (BOPA) provides a focal point for the Onion industry. By working together, we strive to ensure the future production of UK Onions within the fresh produce industry and promote the benefits of increased consumption of Onions. We provide specialist representation for the sector and guide the sector’s research and development projects through various research institutes. The British Onions Producer Association is also part of the British Growers Association, a grower owned, grower led organisation comprising 44 organisations involved in the UK fresh produce Industry.

For more information about **B-hive Innovations** visit <https://www.b-hiveinnovations.co.uk/>.

B-hive Innovations is an innovative, agritech R&D business based in Lincoln. B-hive develops innovative technologies for the agricultural industry to optimise marketable yield, to better crop utilisation and to reduce food waste in the supply chain, thereby increasing revenues within the fresh produce supply chain.