

Cross-Institute Programme for Sustainable Soil Function

SoilCIP

Newsletter for April 2007



BBSRC meeting 'Taking the Lead'

BBSRC's Institute Strategic Committee (ISC) held a meeting at Radcliff House, University of Warwick, on 26th -27th April at which institutes described their contributions to the current 'Grand Challenge Areas' of BBSRC's research: Energy, Climate Change, Sustainable use of Resources, Healthy Ageing, and Animal and Plant Infectious Diseases. I presented the SoilCIP view of what are the Grand Challenges for the Adaptation to and Mitigation of Climate Change and Sustainable use of Soil, and then joined in a wider discussion on Climate Change and Sustainable Resource issues. Thanks to those of you who supplied me with PowerPoint slides and other illustrative material.

I have a further presentation about the SoilCIP to make to BBSRC's Joint Strategy Meeting (JSM) on 10th July. Paul Burrows says in his invitation:

"JSM is an annual one-day meeting between BBSRC Council, Strategy Board, the Chairs of our Strategy Panels and Research Committees and Directors of BBSRC-sponsored institutes. It is a high-level meeting that tends to be very influential over BBSRC's strategic direction and policies. The aim of the JSM this year is to look collectively at some of BBSRC's big investments in bioscience - such as Centres and Initiatives - and to celebrate some of the science highlights. "

I will be in touch nearer the time to discuss my input.

Removal of the CAP on responsive mode grant proposals from institutes

Although there is no CAP on SoilCIP responsive mode grant proposals to BBSRC, it is worth noting that, from July this year, the CAP has also been removed for institutes as well. This also applies to applications to NERC and for NERC institutes applying for BBSRC funding. The effect of this will be reviewed in about a year. Nigel Brown asks that we let SO know when we make a grant application to NERC so that he can monitor the process. At Rothamsted we do that via Ian Crute. For the SoilCIP, I would expect to be informed of any grant applications submitted by SoilCIP staff and will ensure that Ian is informed. We are encouraged to continue to operate an effective and robust sifting process.

Cross-Institute visits and links

Brian Kerry and I visited North Wyke on 19th April to discuss how the research at Rothamsted and North Wyke might be brought together. As the Director of the Centre for Soils and Ecosystem Function (CSEF), Brian is writing the necessary papers to describe the aims, objectives, hypotheses and research strategy of the Centre. The SoilCIP aims and objectives are, of course, clearly defined and will be taken into the Centre as they stand, but looking for new opportunities through the links to the other strand of CSEF research: agroecology.

Rothamsted's senior scientific staff on its Science Strategy Forum (SSF) are eager to visit North Wyke and will be planning the visit in the next few weeks in liaison with Les and others. At our SSF meeting today we agreed that a good focus for this visit would be the Forum's discussion of the developing CSEF science strategy.

Collaboration with the Oxford Centre for Industrial and Applied Mathematics

As a follow-on from the meeting in February (see February's Newsletter) Phil Haygarth, Nigel Bird, Kit Macleod, Murray Lark and Helen Ougham have begun to develop with the OCIAM ideas towards areas of research that might be suitable for collaboration. Specifically, Kit Macleod is working up ideas on the challenges for the plant-soil interface in the context of SoilCIP Objective 3 and IGER/Rothamsted research. The group plan to hold a workshop at North Wyke or Rothamsted in early 2008.

NERC's CAPER (Air Pollution) Committee

Liu Xuejun (a visiting scientist, see below) and I attended the annual meeting of NERC's CAPER Committee on which I sit as BBSRC's representative. The Committee meeting is always held on one of the evening's of a two-day conference at which mostly students present their work as posters and papers in a very friendly and non-threatening environment. This year's meeting was at the University of Sheffield, organised by Gareth Phoenix, who works on the impact of N deposition on the local Derbyshire upland grassland.

Liu Xuejun, Visiting Scientist

Prof Liu Xuejun, a visiting scientist from China Agricultural University, Beijing, returned to China on 15th April after a year working with me at Rothamsted and Neil Cape and others at CEH Edinburgh. Planned collaborations with Jo Smith at the University of Aberdeen could not be fitted into the schedule, but Liu is taking back with him essential tools and technologies for measuring and modelling atmospheric N deposition and its impacts in China. Professor David Fowler, one of CEH's Science Directors, is hoping to develop his links with Prof Liu.

Lesley Ogilvie, postdoc

One disappointment this month has been the resignation of Dr Lesley Ogilvie, just two months after she joined the SoilCIP team to work on a BBSRC grant, because of the high cost of living and childcare in the Rothamsted area. Steve McGrath, Penny Hirsch, Fangjie Zhao and Ian Clark are looking for a replacement. Any contacts or suggestions are welcome.

Newsletter recipients

Although the Director's decide with me who is and who is not in the SoilCIP, the Newsletter is circulated more widely. Murray Lark has asked that all of his research group receive the Newsletter because they all work on soils data for at least a part of their time. Do you have team members or colleagues who you think should receive the Newsletter? How widely should it be circulated? Let me know your views.

Keith Goulding, 30th April 2007