

Cross-Institute Programme for Sustainable Soil Function

SoilCIP

Newsletter for April 2010



Institute Strategy

Maurice has begun a series of meetings with senior staff and, separately, with Bands D and E to discuss and plan institute strategy. We had the first meeting, to discuss vision and mission, as soon as he arrived. Next week we have a follow up for HoDs and HoCs on 11th May and then two days away on 13th and 14th May; Brian Harris from SO will be joining us on the 14th to get up to speed with what we are planning and to provide any updates on ISPG submission. Maurice has already told me and one or two others that he sees soils as one of the distinctive areas of research at the institute, so that's a good start. However, going back to scratch means that our ideas for the next soils ISPG are on hold. We need to show that we have innovative research planned and a clear strategy by which to achieve our goals. Our research will need to map onto the BBSRC's and the institute's strategies and have impact. Please keep me up to speed with any ideas you have and I'll keep you in touch with developments in strategic planning.

Food Security

Last year BBSRC initiated regular telephone conferences between SO and the institutes to share plans and progress in research on food security. I took one last week on Rothamsted's behalf as both Peter and Maurice were away. Key points for soils and related areas were:

1. BBSRC is working with DfID, India and Gates Foundation on a third initiative following SARID and CIDLID. This will likely cover both biotic and abiotic stress in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. India has signalled a strong intention to join this initiative and the Gates foundation is also very interested.
2. There will be the BBSRC equivalent of a NERC 'Sandpit' meeting to select projects for the \$8M NSF-BBSRC photosynthesis programme. The deadline to apply to participate is 15th June.
3. BBSRC should soon be moving forward with Objective (C) of the LWEC programme: 'The sustainable supply of food and water'. A Responsive Mode Highlight Notice will be released, calling for papers on this topic. There is no extra money but the notice would give grant applications a boost for strategic relevance.
4. BBSRC is planning LWEC workshops on:

- a. the impacts of climate change on flowering time, and the knock-on effects of this on food webs and the wider environment;
- b. land use change for mitigating greenhouse gas emissions, especially through the more effective management of soil as a carbon sink.
- c. the integrated modelling of the impacts of climate change on crop production, particularly night-time temperature changes on respiration, and of increasing CO₂ and rainfall.

Agri-Systems Research

Following the BBSRC workshop at the Four Pillars hotel back in January, Andy Whitmore and other key players such as Richard Bardgett and Steve Rushton have been meeting to discuss how the community could better coordinate Agri-Systems grant proposals. Few if any grant proposals have been funded in our area of Agri-Systems research. The problem appears to be that, although the research community is appropriately informed and positioned, to take full advantage of the opportunities in this priority area we need to be better co-ordinated. The initiative seeks to encourage more and effective dialogue between members of the community and ensure that the research base and activities grow and thrive over the next few years. More information from Andy.

BSSS Journals

BSSS Council held our annual meeting with Wiley-Blackwell, the publishers of our two journals, the *European Journal of Soil Science* and *Soil Use & Management*, at Oxford on 21st to 22nd April. Wiley-Blackwell is proving very supportive and effective in promoting the journals, bringing in a very significant income to BSSS. This has been sustained for several years now and has enabled us to employ a full time executive Officer, Dr Kathryn Allton, plus a part-time PA for Kathryn, to rebuild the website and redesign promotional material, and to begin to plan postdoctoral exchanges with overseas soil science societies and other ways to promote soils. Any ideas for ways to promote soil science to me, please. The new BSSS and IPSS websites can be seen at:

<http://www.soils.org.uk/pages/home/>

British Soil Physics Group meeting

In my role as President of the British Society of Soil Science (BSSS), I was invited to give the opening paper at the British Soil Physics Group meeting on 28 April 2010 entitled 'Impacts of predicted climate change on soil water relations' held at Swansea University on 28th April. There was a good number of delegates (>30) for a specialist group meeting, considering that the meeting clashed with the annual UK Biochar conference at Rothamsted. The

BSPG has a page on the BSSS website but there's not much on it at the moment:

<http://bsss.somcom.co.uk/bsss/pages/about-society/regional-special-interest-groups/soil-physics-group>

Philip's Maps

Sharon Hall and I have been working with David Gaylard of Philip's Maps to write a four-page section on 'Food Security' for the company's new World Atlas. We hope to have a final draft ready in the next few weeks; publication will be in the autumn ready for the Christmas market. It is likely that I shall be involved in promoting the atlas, and Rothamsted will gain some useful PR from the process.

Visitor – Dr Alison Bennett

Dr Alison Bennett, a new appointment in the Environment-Plant Interactions group at SCRI, visited us on 14th April, met a number of SoilCIP staff and gave a seminar on her work. She is eager to collaborate, particularly with Jenni, and to use the Sample Archive and Long-Term Experiments.

Keith Goulding, 5th May 2010