

Cross-Institute Programme for Sustainable Soil Function

SoilCIP

Newsletter for February 2008



Cross-Institute links and visits

KG and Director

Ian Crute and I spent a very useful and pleasant two days at North Wyke on 7th and 8th February. Ian hopes to visit North Wyke every couple of months. When Rothamsted takes over responsibility for North Wyke administration, senior North Wyke staff will join our Institute Executive Committee and Science Strategy Forum (SSF), which meet on alternative months. The most recent minutes of the SSF propose that it will meet at N Wyke in July/August this year.

SAB

I attended North Wyke's Science Advisory Board on 11th February in place of Brian Kerry, who was away. The very useful, and possibly final, SAB meeting signed off North Wyke's Mission statement and science strategy. North Wyke Research will become 'live' on 1st April and there will be a formal launch at Westminster on the evening of 14th May.

SRAC

I attended the Soils Research Advisory Committee meeting on 13th February at which four of the recent initiatives to coordinate and structure research involving soils and land use in the UK were reviewed. I explained the development, structures and aims of the SoilCIP. Louise Heathwaite explained her role as NERC's leader of their 'Sustainable Use of Natural Resources' theme; more details at:

<http://www.nerc.ac.uk/research/themes/resources/>

John Grace explained the Scottish SAGES (Scottish Alliance for Geoscience, Environment and Society) initiative which, according to John, has delivered 35 new posts to Scottish research centres:

<http://www.sages.ac.uk/>

and Colin Campbell described the soils research in the Scottish Research Programmes:

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Research/15597/23153>

I have been asked to take part in a review of the relevant work packages of the Scottish Research Programmes in December this year.

BSSS autumn meeting

We will be organising a on-day meeting of the British Society of Soil Science at Rothamsted this coming September.

'Something old, something new: integrating molecular biology with other techniques in soil science'

What is the potential for the application of molecular biology in soil science? What do molecular biologists need to know about soils to apply their techniques effectively? How should we integrate molecular with other methods to answer some of the key questions posed to soil science today?

We will be holding a one-day meeting to begin to consider these questions and which we hope will generate some review or discussion papers in our journals. Our preliminary plans are to have a thought-provoking keynote paper to set the scene and develop some ideas, followed by offered contributions. We invite offers of presentations (15+5 minutes) and posters to develop the debate, present current or proposed approaches and generate discussion consisting of a title, author(s), affiliations and a brief (100 word) outline.

We would like to know how many potential delegates would stay to a conference dinner on the evening of 17th. If there is sufficient interest we will organise it.

Keith Goulding, Andy Whitmore, Saran Sohi and Lucy Gilliam

US soils exhibit

Pat Bruneau, Policy and Advice Officer - Soil Science / Soils Network (JNCC), Scottish Natural Heritage, e-mailed some of us to say:

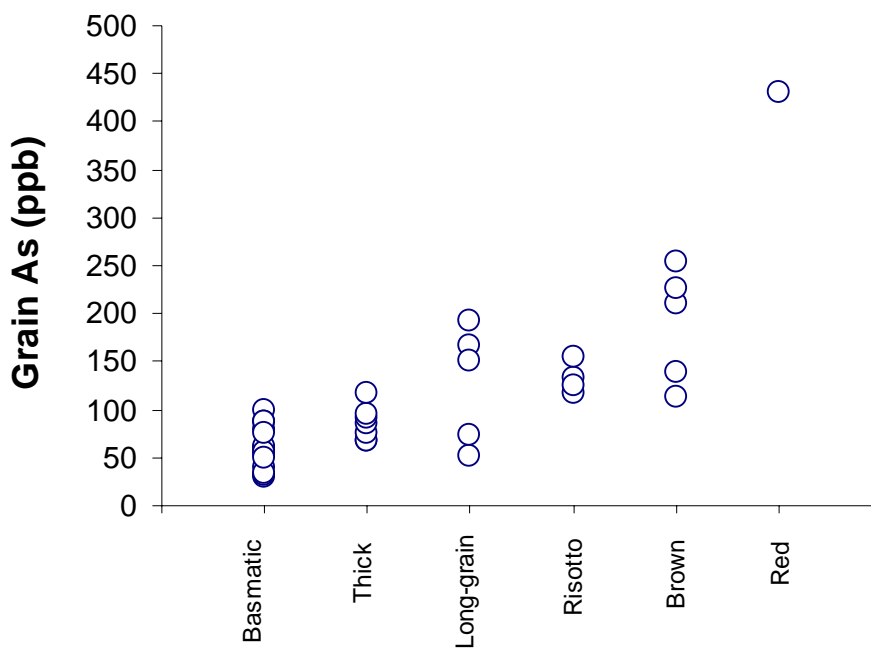
For information: Forthcoming exhibition on soil at the Smithsonian Institute. "Dig It! The Secrets of Soil", to start on 19 July. Can we dream of similar exhibition in the UK?

Patricia

How safe is your rice?

As part of their new BBSRC-DFID project on arsenic, Steve McGrath, Fangjie Zhao and Sarah Dunham have been analysing the arsenic (As) content of rice bought in local shops. Staff were asked to provide small samples of rice for analysis. 46 samples were received from 18 people, purchased from Tesco, Sainsbury's, Waitrose, Somerfield, ASDA, M&S, and Chinese shops; countries of origin were India, Foothills of Himalaya, Thailand, China, USA, Spain, Italy, France, and Uruguay. Results are below:

As concentration in different types of rice



The critical factor is the concentration times the amount of rice eaten. Unless you eat a lot of rice, your As intake will be relatively small. However, societies very dependent on rice risk ingesting a dangerous amount of As. More details from Fangjie Zhao.

Keith Goulding, 29th February 2008