

Cross-Institute Programme for Sustainable Soil Function

SoilCIP

Newsletter for June 2008



Jenkinson Building opens

On 26th June the new Jenkinson Building, housing soil physics laboratories and sample processing facilities, was opened by Professor Sir David Read, Chair of the Rothamsted Board of Governors. This gives our soil physicists and others excellent new facilities and is a great step forward for the SoilCIP. There's nothing on the Rothamsted website yet but I would expect some photos, etc, soon.

PhD studentships

I have just received notice of the schedule for bidding for Rothamsted's BBSRC Quota PhD studentships for 2009 onwards. We have no more SoilCIP studentships so it would be good to submit some proposals for the Rothamsted studentships. The covering e-mail makes it clear that certain, yet to be agreed, 'strategically important areas' will be favoured, as will younger supervisors and co-supervisors (but you must be registered) and those successful at winning grants. I suspect that collaborative bids, at least within and preferably across Centres, will also be well received.

Proposals must go through Centres and there is plenty of time to put them together: the deadline for bids to have been reviewed by Centres and submitted to the Postgraduate Education Committee is 10 November. No doubt Centre Directors will set their own timetables for when they want to receive the bids and how they will assess them. Please send a copy of any bid to me.

Visits

At the beginning of the month, I attended a Unilever Sustainable Agriculture Advisory Board meeting in The Netherlands. As part of the trip we visited a 'Ben and Jerry's' ice cream factory and one of the farms on which the milk used at the factory is produced. (The milk is also used to make 'Beemster' cheese, which I had never heard of but is very good.) This was, not surprisingly, an enjoyable trip but it might also lead to some funding from Unilever, which is eager to produce a nitrous oxide inventory for the company. More about Ben & Jerry's 'Caring Dairy' programme at:

<http://www.benjerry.co.uk/caringdairy/about-us.php>

By the way, I met the man hugging the cow!

EUROSOIL

Andy Whitmore, Andy Gregory and Carolin Cordova will be presenting oral papers at EUROSOIL in Vienna in August. Is anyone else going?

BSSS autumn meeting

As noted in an earlier newsletter, the autumn meeting of the British Society of Soil Science will be held at Rothamsted, on 17 September 2008: 'Something old, something new: integrating molecular biology with other techniques in soil science'. We have received 12 offers of papers/posters for the meeting, which the organizing committee are currently sifting. It promises to be an excellent and stimulating discussion, so do consider registering.

Gloomy News

BCPC Food Chain Forum

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The impact of new EU legislation on UK food production, availability and price.

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"The production of potatoes, leafy vegetables and wheat in the UK will fall by up to 60% - and the result will be at least a doubling - in some cases trebling - of price. Worse still, production of many home-grown fruit and vegetables - such as peas, beans, onions, carrots, lettuce and strawberries - will become uneconomic, so these will simply disappear from supermarket shelves. This will happen in the next 5-10 years."

These were the startling conclusions from the BCPC Food Chain Forum held in London on 6 June 2008. The Forum was attended by key food-chain stakeholders - growers, advisors, retailers, consumer organisations and government representatives - who reviewed the likely impact of new EU legislation on UK food production, availability and price. This Forum focused on the UK food-chain, but the conclusions of the meeting are equally relevant in all EU Member States.

For the Presentations given at the meeting and the Conclusions of the Forum, see:

<http://www.bcpc.org/Events/FoodChainForum/index.asp>

Extracts from the

BIOSCIENCES FEDERATION

**Report on science policy
May 2008**

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

"When Tony Blair addressed the Royal Society in 2002, he won over his audience by purring that 'science matters'. Yesterday Jacqui Smith added: sort of". A Times editorial comments on Government proposals to reclassify cannabis against scientific advice (Times, 8th May).

The government will aim to reduce the administrative burden placed on researchers and charities caused by the introduction of full economic costs. Speaking at the Breast Cancer

Campaign 2nd Scientific Conference in London on 13th May, Ian Pearson, the science minister, acknowledged that extra accounting procedures associated with FEC sometimes fell on researchers and charities. "I do appreciate that, for researchers in the field and for charities themselves, full economic cost funding does not necessarily come without problems and that we need to do something about that," he said. "It's not the principle that's at fault, but the way it's sometimes implemented." Pearson said the application of full economic costing principles by universities to research contracts with non-governmental bodies could also cause problems. For example, he said, some charities have difficulty paying for project overheads because of the terms of their deeds of trust. In order to address this Pearson said the government would increase funding to the Charity Support Fund operated by the Higher Education Funding Council for England by 50 per cent to £270 million per year in 2010-11. The fund aims to bridge the gap between charitable research grants and the full cost of the projects they support. http://www.dius.gov.uk/speeches/pearson_cancer_130508.html

The UK is leading the way in building international research collaborations, according to a report commissioned by Universities UK and the Higher Education Funding Council for England's international unit. The report said that UK scientists are engaged in 50 per cent more international collaborations than 10 years ago and that growth in the number of collaborations is expected to continue. However, the report says that larger, well-established research countries, including the UK, have seen their share of global international research output eroded and it cautions that universities must continue to attract and retain links with the best scientific talent to ensure that it remains competitive. It recommends that strategically managing international activity will help universities build on existing partnerships. The report identifies the US, Germany and France as the UK's most prolific international partnerships, while the UK's fastest growing international partnerships are with researchers in China, where there has been a doubling in the output of international research papers between the 1990s and 2005. <http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/mediareleases/show.asp?MR=608>

Researchers applying for funding under the Natural Environment Research Council's responsive mode scheme will from now on be asked to provide a plan of how the knowledge generated from their work would be disseminated. In order to win funding, applicants will have to provide a two-page plan describing how their work might be of benefit to others and how they intend to spread the information generated by the proposed project. The new rules take effect from 1 July but will not be mandatory until 1 December, when any proposal not including a KE plan will be automatically rejected. <http://www.nerc.ac.uk/funding/application/keplans.asp>

I'm on holiday for the first half of June and so will send the next Newsletter at the end of August. I expect to be at North Wyke from 28-30 July.

Keith Goulding, 30th June 2008