Foreword to Annual Report 2001/2002

James E. Godfrey, Chairman of the Governing Body

I am pleased to report on another successful year for The Scottish Crop Research Institute (SCRI), Bio-Mathematics and Statistics Scotland (BioSS) and Mylnefield Research Services Ltd (MRS). All three organisations have produced excellent work and met their financial targets again, a major achievement.

Research has again been operating in a difficult environment. We have seen further dis-investment of the agricultural biotechnology companies from the UK to countries more committed to this technology, partly due to low profitability of agriculture, high costs of UK research and the political environment. UK agriculture is now 0.9% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), but this is misleading because agriculture is part of a much larger food, drink and non-food chain accounting for a substantial portion of GDP. With margins squeezed in main-stream agriculture, many are looking at niche markets such as industrial oils, bio-fuel and energy crops, but these are not the panacea for the foreseeable future. Not all commodities are in oversupply, indeed, the EU is currently considering ways to increase the production of protein crops to reduce dependence on imported supplies.

Many of the publications and comments about the future of agriculture in the UK and the EU are introspective, and lack long-term vision. In contrast, "A Science Roadmap for Agriculture" prepared by the National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges of the USA (see Report of the Director) provides a constructive way forward for US agriculture. An analysis adopting a similar approach in the UK would give a refreshing positive vision, and would complement the Curry Report and aid its implementation.

We need more stability in funding; for example, more core funding with additional flexibility for programmes to be determined by Institutes working within their mission statements. The insecurity of three-year contracts and problems associated with recruiting short-term staff mean much time is spent on administration and project writing resulting in less quality time spent on research, which in turn inevitably means innovation is stifled. Innovation is the prerequisite for research. It requires teams of people and freedom to operate; it is enhanced by collaboration and competition with other centres. This latter point can be seen by some as duplication, but this is rarely if ever the case. Great innovations are not driven from the paymasters down to teams but rather come up from the base, often from unexpected team members looking at a problem with a different perspective or carrying out a procedure in an unusual way.

If innovation is the prerequisite for research, then uptake is the goal. We must, however, use the technologies appropriate to the different markets; for example, in Japan and the USA their agricultural outputs have risen at similar rates over the past four decades. Nevertheless the technologies used to deliver the outputs have been different: Japan has used land-saving technologies, whilst the USA has used labour-saving technologies. Similarly Sub-Saharan Africa requires labour saving whilst India requires land-saving technology; in other words, it is using technology to maximise scarce resources, and it is research and development that delivers the technology chosen.

Concern must be expressed over the loss of areas of science in the UK. Nematology and virology are key areas under threat, both are important to the UK and globally, here at SCRI we are an international centre of excellence in both these disciplines.

During the year, the Institute, senior staff and the Governing Body through its Science Committee have reviewed the science programme and set a new science strategy based on three themes giving clearer focus to the research programmes. This will give us the platform to go forward. In the past few months we have reviewed our Knowledge Transfer and Exploitation (KTE) of our research culminating in a presentation to an expert panel as a prelude to the Visiting Group review of our science in May 2003. This KTE exercise demonstrated the enormous output of our science over the past few years with many examples of good

returns on investment whether by Government or industry.

I thank my Governing Body for their support during the year, the staff at SCRI, BioSS and MRS for all their hard work and dedication in achieving another successful year of science and delivery of that science. Finally my special thanks to the Director, Professor John Hillman, for his tremendous energy, vision and dedication to the success and reputation of SCRI, BioSS and MRS.