Partnerships and Collaboration

SCRI's long established links with the Scottish Agricultural College were put on a more formal basis in May with the signing of a memorandum of understanding. A brief ceremony was held prior to the annual meeting of the Scottish Society for Crop Research.

The first months of the new partnership saw many encouraging outcomes. Recent collaboration on the development of diagnostics for potato diseases has led to a test for soil-borne pathogens, initially developed at SCRI, being further developed by SAC into a validated commercial proposition. SAC and SCRI will be collaborating in future to ensure that other relevant diagnostic tests are made available commercially through SAC.

Research on soils is taking into consideration the impacts of climate change on agricultural production, including the role of soil physical damage, biological processes and extreme weather events on greenhouse gas production. SAC and SCRI soil scientists also collaborated with the Macaulay Institute on a RERAD funded project to identify 'Soil Quality Indicators'. By working together the group was able to encompass a much greater range of specialisms and to incorporate both strategic science and advisory expertise.

A Home Grown Cereals Authority for research on blending wheat was obtained during the course of the year. The aim is to investigate resilience, improved distilling quality and greater environmental stability. The project was derived from the previous work of Adrian Newton and Stuart Swanston on barley mixtures and wheat mixtures for distilling, and the earlier work of Bill Spoor and Steve Hoad on barley mixtures.

Professor Bill McKelvey, Chief Executive and Principal of SAC, Dr Keith Dawson and Professor Peter Gregory signing the Memorandum of Understanding.

SCRI's Director presents last year's annual report to Dr Mahmoud Solh, the Director General of the International Centre for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas – ICARDA.

In January 2007 a group from SCRI, including Lesley Torrance, Pete Iannetta, Ian Toth and Geoff Squire, flew to Ås in Norway to sign a memorandum of understanding with Bioforsk – the Norwegian Institute for Agricultural and Environmental Research. (Photo: E. Fløistad/Bioforsk)

2007 also introduced a new relationship with Bioforsk – the Norwegian Institute for Agricultural and Environmental Research which is bringing new ventures and plans for joint research. In January an SCRI team including Lesley Torrance, Pete Iannetta, Ian Toth and Geoff Squire visited the academic complex at Ås in Norway for the signing of a memorandum of understanding.

SCRI has broadened its relationship with the European Alternative Splicing Network – EURASNET. The organisation brings together 30 leading research groups from eleven European countries as well as Israel and Argentina. Alternative splicing is an important factor in human disease and also in how plants grow and respond to changes in environmental conditions. SCRI contributes to this network through research conducted in a group led by Professor John Brown. An agreement has now been concluded under which SCRI will host and maintain the EURASNET website.

During 2007 SCRI staff were pleased to welcome no fewer than three, high level delegations representing the government of the People's Republic of China. In May, the Chinese Vice Minister of Agriculture visited SCRI: together with other senior officials he discussed ways of strengthening UK – China links in agriculture and crop research. There were also visits by officials representing the various regional governments of China and by Dr Wang Baoqing, the Minister Counsellor for Science and Technology at the Chinese Embassy in London.

SCRI's links with China were further extended when Glenn Bryan from Genetics was invited to attend a UK–China Symposium on Genomics and Biodiversity during September. This symposium, jointly sponsored by the Royal Society and the Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS), was held in the Wuhan Botanic Garden. Discussions were held on UK and Chinese research into the biology of the Solanaceae and possible areas of future collaboration were investigated. The Solanaceae – the nightshade family – contains a number of important food plants, such as potato, tomato, pepper and eggplant, as well as medicinal plants such as henbane. The Symposium ended with a 3-day field visit to the Xishuangbanna region of Yunnan province in Southern China, a region of extreme botanical diversity which is under severe threat from rapid expansion of iron mining and rubber-plantations.