



Royal Agricultural Society of England welcomes and supports the “Grand Challenge” to provide global food security

The Royal Agricultural Society of England (RASE) has welcomed the call by British scientists for a £2billion initiative to tackle global food security.

The £2 billion Grand Challenge was launched today by The Royal Society and RASE Director of Agri-Science Ian Smith said that RASE “welcomed and supported this vital initiative”.

“We are on exactly the same page as the Royal Society,” said Mr Smith. “The RASE has been pointing to the widening funding gap in agricultural and food research for a long time now. Like the Royal Society, we are concerned about the twin challenges of burgeoning world population and the threat of climate change. The challenge is not just to break new ground with fundamental research but to reconnect with a proper system of applied research and technology transfer that gets new technologies down to the farm - at home and abroad - so that producers can begin the drive to higher output that is vital to our survival.

“The Grand Challenge programme should support areas of research that have been neglected in recent years including the exploration of new methods of crop management to increase yields and minimise environmental impact. The Royal Society report also mentions new approaches to irrigation, seed treatment and interaction between the physical environment and agricultural systems.

“The report has picked up on the need to maintain the UK’s capacity to innovate and the loss of teaching and research facilities at Universities. These are all issues the RASE has been promoting - particularly the lack of soil scientists which we highlighted in our report a year ago.

“As a Society, we welcome and support the report and are delighted to see it has highlighted the need for more applied science and the urgency with which we must address the potential skills gap the UK is likely to experience in many of these areas.”

In its report, published today (21 October 2009), the Royal Society says that the UK should lead international research efforts if we are to achieve the massive increase in food crop production that will be required by 2050 to meet global food demands without damaging the environment.

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For further information:

Ian Smith Director of Agri-Science, RASE
696969

Tel: 02476

Issued by:

Denis Chamberlain Director of Communications
680800

Tel: 07860