

# SCRI takes major role in ClimaFruit group aiming to boost berry industry

## Four years and £5.2m budget to cut chemical use and carbon footprint of soft fruit sector

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COMMERCIAL soft fruit growing has long been associated with Scotland and yesterday an international link up was announced between Scottish scientists involved in raspberry, blackcurrant and blueberry research and colleagues in Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Germany.

The consortium – which has a budget of around £5.2 million and which will run for four years – will look at ways of reducing chemical use and cutting the carbon footprint of horticultural production systems.

It will also concentrate on securing the production of locally grown fruit, providing fresh healthy food products and natural ingredients for foods with reduced chemical residues.

Fittingly for a project called ClimaFruit, another goal is to develop strategies for the berry industry to secure its future in times of threat from climate change.

The Scottish Crop Research Institute in Invergowrie is taking the lead role for the UK. Linked with its commercial subsidiary, Mylnefield Research Services, SCRI has a proven track record in soft fruit research and breeding.

SCRI-bred raspberry Glen Ample is currently the most popular variety in the UK.

And the domination of SCRI in the world of blackcurrant growing is shown by the fact that half of all blackcurrants grown around the globe are varieties bred in Invergowrie.

Commenting on the creation of the consortium, environment secretary Richard Lochhead said: “The government supports SCRI in its ambitions to secure the long-

term future of the soft fruit industry, reduce its environmental impact and encourage greater production of locally grown, natural, healthy fruits.”

Lochhead also stated his belief that the move would provide a valuable boost to Scottish soft fruit production which is a major contributor to the agricultural sector.

SCRI's lead scientist on the project, Dr Derek Stewart, said the institute's role as lead organisation in the consortium was a recognition of its work in soft fruit research and breeding.

He said: “A recent external review described the soft fruit team here as ‘world leaders’.

“To be involved in this north European/North Sea Region consortium is a huge boost for us. It's also evidence that Scotland's vital berry industry has got first-rate research and development capability on its doorstep.”

He said he believed that beyond the scientific benefits, there could also be economic spin-offs, including the creation of new businesses that would contribute to local economies and help step up production of both fresh and processed berry products.

Soft fruit production in Scotland is concentrated on less than 2,000 hectares of land with half of that area being committed to raspberry and blackcurrant growing.

Most of the raspberry crop is grown under polytunnels in order to extend the harvest period, which nowadays can stretch from May to November.

Scottish growers are also increasing the acreage of blueberries being grown in this country

because of their popularity due to their perceived health benefits.

Apart from the SCRI, the other ClimaFruit consortium partners are Aarhus University, Denmark; the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences; Bioforsk, Norway; the Norwegian University of Life Sciences and LWK Niedersachsen Fruit Research Institute, Germany

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