

£5m study boost for soft fruit sector

PROJECT AIMS TO CUT CHEMICAL USE

BY JOE WATSON

SCIENTISTS from across Europe have joined forces in a new initiative to make soft fruit production more environmentally friendly.

They are sharing £5.2million over the next four years to reduce chemical use on blackcurrants, raspberries and blackberries as well as cut growers' carbon footprints and help them find more efficient ways of using water and nutrients.

The hope is the scientists can secure the future of an agricultural sector that is seen as vital in helping improve the health of humans as well as assist growers mitigate the impact of climate change on their farms.

Another aim is to create a world-leading research team focusing on soft fruit.

The researchers involved in the project are at the Scottish Crop Research Institute at Invergowrie, near Dundee, and in Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Germany.

Rural Affairs Cabinet Secretary Richard Lochhead said: "Scottish science is already renowned worldwide and by SCRI joining this international consortium, it will further enhance its reputation for excellence. It will also provide a valuable boost to Scottish soft fruit production which is a major contributor to the agricultural sector."

Derek Stewart, who is in charge of SCRI's plant products and food quality programme, said its involvement in the initiative was a huge boost for staff who were recently described as world leaders in an external review.