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The James Hutton Institute has been awarded two Technology Strategy Board grants, worth a combined £1 million, to apply genomics to the development of raspberry varieties and to develop a plan for UK low-bush blueberry production for juicing.

JHI soft fruit geneticist Dr Julie Graham said: "There is great scope for increasing soft fruit production in the UK to meet demand from consumers and processors. However, no high-quality varieties with resistance to pests and diseases are currently available."

Breeding a new soft fruit variety can take up to 15 years, she explained, but this time frame is being reduced with the growing use of genetic markers. "This project aims to identify markers for multiple complex traits, which then will lead to significant advances in variety development," she said.

Graham explained that for the second project, JHI researchers will develop a growing protocol and assess a range of low-bush blueberry varieties for establishment and yield potential at Aldbar near Brechin and at Invergowrie near Dundee.

The fruit will then be processed by local business partner Ella Drinks to assess the colour and juice quality, in order to develop a viable juice product using both low-bush and high-bush crops.

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