

IBERS RWS/02

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PRESS RELEASE

Research centre worth billions to farmers, the economy and the environment

Reports highlights the contribution of Aberystwyth University's IBERS centre

Wales's newest international research institute is generating millions for the Welsh and UK economies and is worth billions of pounds for farmers and the environment.

A report on the Institute of Biological, Environmental and Rural Sciences (IBERS) at Aberystwyth University by international consultants DTZ also shows that its research is invaluable in tackling some of the major problems of climate change, food security and disease.

Formed 15 months ago, when the former IGER research centre at Gogerddan merged into Aberystwyth University, IBERS has already established itself as a world leader in scientific research that produces practical and commercial benefits.

According to DTZ the work carried out by IBERS on three campuses in and around Aberystwyth is so wide in range that a full analysis is impossible, but they have provided a snapshot of some of the main contributions.

IBERS own operations produce almost £60 million for the economy and supports almost 700 jobs, both directly and indirectly. There are 341 scientists and support staff in the Institute – the largest collection of expertise of its kind in the UK.

The effect of the Institute's research work is worth even more – it is already saving hundreds of millions of pounds a year for farmers and the wider economy – in future the benefits will be even greater.

These are some of the highlights of DTZ's report:

- Work being done by IBERS scientists on reducing methane emissions from farm animals could be worth £322 million to the economy annually.
- IBERS research and products are currently worth millions of pounds in themselves and they also provide massive benefits for the wider economy – for instance, forage and cereal varieties produced by the Institute currently generate almost £8M annually in seed sales.

- Savings in fertiliser costs by UK farmers each year as a result of research into clover at IBERS amounts to £13.5M.
- The Institute's work over many years on improving the quality and use of grassland is estimated to save farmers £400 million a year on feed costs.

Much of the work at IBERS will also have major benefits for other countries across the world – for instance, by developing high yielding crops that can withstand some of the effects of climate change in developing countries and save millions of pounds in re-seeding costs.

- Other research projects will lead to vaccines against costly world-wide diseases such as TB and bilharzia, a water borne parasite which affects 200 million people in developing countries and causes 300,000 deaths annually.
- The results of research on adding yeast probiotics to the diets of dairy cattle show that the resulting increase in milk yields could earn UK farmers an extra £116 million a year.
- Many of the projects will also provide environmental benefits – for example developing miscanthus as a bio-fuel could produce electricity for millions of people and reduce carbon emissions whilst new deep-rooting grass hybrids which are under development could help in flood prevention.

Other strands of the Institute's research provide the evidence upon which national government policies can be based including the sustainability of fisheries, improving the healthy fat content of beef, measuring the beneficial and harmful components of foods and predicting the spread of pests and diseases such as malaria.

Commercial ventures which have arisen out research at IBERS include two spin-out companies in livestock breeding and instrument manufacture while a new commercial partnership is even developing sensors mounted on unmanned aircraft that can monitor crops and assess the need for water and fertiliser.

"These highlights are only a small part of the work being done at IBERS," says Institute Director, Wayne Powell. "We are a world-class centre of excellence for ground-breaking science research which can be adapted to tackle some of the great problems facing the world today.

"This report places a financial value on much of the work and shows how good science can contribute and save billions of pounds; some of the other benefits of our work are literally immeasurable."