

News Release

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£10m award boosts bid to aid plight of tropical farmers

Efforts to tackle challenges faced by livestock farmers in developing countries have been boosted by a £10 million research award.

Researchers will use the funds from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to investigate how genetic information can improve the health and productivity of farmed animals in tropical climates, which is a proven approach to climate change mitigation and adaptation

Institutions in Scotland and Africa where the researchers will be based are making additional contributions with a value of £10 million to support the initiative over the next five years.

The Centre for Tropical Livestock Genetics and Health is an alliance between the University of Edinburgh, Scotland's Rural College (SRUC) and the Africa-headquartered International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI).

Teams will investigate the genes that make some animals more resistant to diseases than others. They will also explore why certain breeds are able to thrive in hot and arid conditions.

Their aim is to develop technologies that will help farmers in developing countries to identify the best animals within a herd from which to breed. The research will help Africa's farmers to improve the quality and productivity of their livestock.

Researchers will also use genetic techniques to identify and track emerging livestock diseases in tropical countries.

The University of Edinburgh's involvement is being led by The Roslin Institute, which receives strategic funding from the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council and is one of the UK's National Institutes of Biosciences.

Professor David Hume, Director of The Roslin Institute, said: "This new joint centre will enable us to adapt, develop and transfer knowledge on improving livestock productivity to developing countries and greatly improve the lives of smallholder farmers in tropical environments."

Professor Andrew Peters, SRUC's Assistant Principal International, said: "We are delighted to be partners in this important initiative to improve the genetics of cattle and poultry in sub-Saharan Africa, contributing to the improvement of livelihoods of smallholder farmers. This is a unique and valuable collaboration between the four institutions all bringing their respective skills, expertise and resources to the table. We see it as only the beginning of what will grow into a major international initiative to improve the lot of poor farmers but also contributing importantly to reduction of greenhouse gas emissions by farm livestock."

Africa's involvement in the centre is led by ILRI, a member of CGIAR, a global scientific research-for-development partnership that advances agricultural research for a food-secure future.

Dr Jimmy Smith, Director General of ILRI, said: "The work of this new centre comes at an opportune time, when demand for milk, meat and eggs is rising fast in developing countries. The centre's focus on livestock genetics will help the world's one billion small-scale livestock keepers to meet that growing demand for animal-source foods, and thus to improve both their livelihoods and their food security."

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