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News Release

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Tropical farmers' plight is focus of animal research initiative

Challenges faced by livestock farmers in tropical developing countries are the focus of a new alliance involving researchers from Scotland and Africa.

The new Centre for Tropical Livestock Genetics and Health will initially focus on the use of genetic information to improve the health and productivity of farmed animals in tropical climates.

The aim is to develop technologies that will help farmers in developing countries to identify the best animals to breed from, so they can improve the economic value and quality of their livestock.

Joint teams from Scotland and Africa will explore the genes that make some animals more resistant to diseases than others, as well as those that enable certain breeds to thrive in warmer, arid conditions.

Researchers will also use genetic techniques to characterise new diseases that emerge and to track outbreaks.

The University of Edinburgh and Scotland's Rural College (SRUC) have joined forces with the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI) in Kenya to launch the initiative.

The new Centre will have locations in Scotland and Africa. The Scotland site will be located on the University of Edinburgh's Easter Bush Campus, which includes The Roslin Institute, The Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies and Scotland's Rural College.

Professor David Hume, Director of The Roslin Institute, said: "With the threat of rising temperatures due to climate change, the need for affordable techniques to improve farming and food security in warmer climates is becoming a global challenge. We are delighted to announce this new partnership to address the issue, which builds on existing, successful collaborations between our three organisations."

Professor Geoff Simm, SRUC Vice-Principal Research, said: "We are proud to be working in partnership with the University and ILRI. This is a very significant alliance because it has the potential to transform our international efforts to help improve livestock genetics, enhancing food security but also reducing the environmental impact of global livestock production. We also anticipate that SRUC's proposed strategic alignment with the University will significantly strengthen the potential for the new Centre."

Ranked among the top universities in the world

The Africa site will be located at the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI) in Nairobi, Kenya. It will involve scientists from both ILRI's new global livestock genetics program (LiveGene) and the Biosciences eastern and central Africa (BecA)-ILRI Hub and their partners in Africa.

Dr Jimmy Smith, Director General of ILRI said: "ILRI is delighted to be forming this new alliance with the eminent University of Edinburgh's Roslin Institute and Scotland's Rural College. Modern genetic approaches offer new opportunities to identify livestock suited to the diverse and demanding conditions under which African smallholder farmers work. This new alliance brings together a unique mix of skills to address these exciting and important challenges."

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