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Tackling the challenges of feeding a growing global population on limited land resources -
Leading international team of researchers launches the DEVIL project.

Launch of the DEVIL Project

In May 2015 the kick-off of a cutting-edge, global project took place in Aberdeen, Scotland. The Project “Delivering Food Security on Limited Land (DEVIL) aims to tackle one of society’s biggest challenges – feeding a growing population now and in the future on limited land resources. The project will explore feedbacks and interactions between land use change and food security dynamics using high resolution, spatially disaggregated global models, databases of soils, land-use, crops and livestock and a range of scenarios related to food production and demand side measures. The 4 year project was selected to be funded by the prestigious Belmont Forum and the FACCE-JPI initiative through a highly competitive process.

Leading International Team of Researchers

The DEVIL project is a partnership between the Scottish Food Security Alliance-Crops (SFSa-C), which is a collaborative venture between the University of Aberdeen, The James Hutton Institute and University of Dundee, and world leading partners from 7 other countries including the University of Minnesota (USA), CSIRO (Australia), University of Witswatersrand (South Africa), The Brazilian Space Agency (INPE; Brazil), the Central Rice Research Institute (India), INRA (France) and ETH Zurich (Switzerland).

The project is coordinated by Prof. Pete Smith from the Institute of Biological & Environmental Sciences in the College of Life Sciences and Medicine and Prof Deb Roberts from the Business School at the University of Aberdeen and the James Hutton Institute.

“We are privileged to be working with such a stellar cast of scientists on this project”, said Prof. Smith, “we put together a dream team to tackle one of the societal grand challenges of the 21st Century; feeding a global population of 9-10 billion people by 2050, and we are delighted that the team and project has come together”.

Project co-leader Professor Deb Roberts said, “The challenge of delivering food security on limited land is so great that no single discipline has the tools to address it. That is why we have assembled this multi-disciplinary team, involving natural scientists, social scientists, nutritionists, economists and knowledge exchange experts from around the world. All partners are leaders in their fields, and we are delighted to have to opportunity to bring this expertise to bear one of the world’s most pressing challenges.”

Connecting Global Stakeholders

The project also has the support of the World Bank and CCAFS (the CGIAR research program on Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security) who will accompany the project, providing advice

and connections to key networks and stakeholders. Aside from the global analysis of interactions between global change drivers, land use change and food supply and demand the project will also carry out further regional analysis together with local stakeholders. This will take place in sub-Saharan Africa and South America, two regions key when it comes to questions of food security and land use change.

Supporting Decision Making

DEVIL will produce a number of outputs relevant for policy and decision making at regional and global scales. These outputs include:

- For food security decision makers at the national level: A range of options to support delivering food security in the region, with supporting maps highlighting the land use impacts of different scenarios;
- For climate change decision makers: A range of options to improve climate resilience, reduce emissions and provide nutritious food;
- For researchers: New models and data on global food security options on limited land;
- For research funding agencies: Identification of key knowledge gaps that require further research and development to address food security and land use challenges;
- For young leaders and scientists: Capacity building opportunities that will support the next generation of decision makers to tackle food security challenges across disciplines and scales.

Ensuring Engagement and Dialogue

The World Food System Center at ETH Zurich is responsible for the engagement, dialogue and education strategy of the project. This will involve integrating key stakeholders at the global and regional levels into the project from an early stage, through workshops and exchange platforms. Given the significance of the challenge that DEVIL is addressing, it is also critical to engage the next generation of leaders and decision makers in the process. To that end the World Food System Center will coordinate two intensive training programs for graduate level students and postdocs from around the world in the framework of the project. These programs will engage young leaders and scientists from across the food system to work together to learn about their role in tackling complex challenges related to food security and land use change. The participants will interact with the DEVIL researchers and contribute to the research process by working on project related case studies during the training program.

Further Links: Scottish Food Security Alliance: www.sfsa-crops.org // ETH Zurich World Food System Center: www.worldfoodsystem.ethz.ch //

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