



## **RASE report draws attention to “broken links” between science and practice**

Over the last 25 years UK government policy has tended to separate science and practice to the extent that the partnership between scientists and practical farmers, one which has underpinned agricultural success for nearly two centuries, is now under serious threat.

This is the key message delivered in a report published by the Royal Agricultural Society of England and written by the chairman of RASE’s Practice with Science Committee, Professor David Leaver. The report is to be circulated to each of the main political parties during the election campaign

“Practice with Science is the RASE motto. It has guided the development of the Society and has driven its contribution to help improve and promote technical progress in UK farming. The uptake of scientific development has been the foundation on which profitable agriculture has been built. We are now in grave danger of breaking those links. The election provides us with an opportunity to get this on the political agenda,” said Prof Leaver.

In his report, Prof Leaver says that the implications of a non-functioning research chain are that new innovations and technologies will evolve and be adopted more slowly, UK agriculture will grow in productivity and competitiveness at a lower rate than other countries and this will result in a greater reliance on other countries to produce our food.

“The food price spike in 2008 challenged politicians to re-consider their views on food security and the role of UK agriculture in food production,” he said. “But while much has been said in Government circles, relevant actions are still awaited.”

In the report, RASE calls for a new approach to research, development and extension involving both public and private sectors working together in partnership as follows:

- Currently £280m is directed by government and its agencies at what is designated as agricultural research, but this appears to be having little impact on either total production or productivity of the agricultural industry. Agricultural research should be aimed at increasing production and output from sustainable production systems with the clear aim of increasing competitiveness of the agricultural industry.
- Whilst ‘blue sky’ basic science research underpinning agriculture is important, it should not necessarily be at the funding level of the past ten years if this prevents funds being directed at industry-directed research. The principle of ‘use-inspired basic science research’ should be adopted by the government and its agencies when funding a proportion of research programmes. These programmes should have proposed outcomes in terms of increased agricultural productivity.

- Research providers (universities and research institutes) should recognise that research aimed at ‘use’ rather than ‘understanding’ is of great value to the country. This recognition should be reflected in the balance of their research, in the expertise of scientists appointed and in the career structures and rewards for these scientists.
- Universities appear to have no mandate to deliver benefits to the agricultural industry at present, and until universities are encouraged to carry out industry-directed research, a number of research institutes should be retained to lead research for the various agricultural sectors.
- Research institutes can extend ‘use-inspired’ research into application through field-scale experimentation and in collaboration with industry research and knowledge transfer organisations. The restoration of an adequate capacity in applied research will be necessary including the required infrastructure and expertise.
- Agricultural and Horticultural Development Board should provide leadership to the agricultural industry in developing a positive strategy to increase agricultural production, productivity and sustainability. This will mean developing collaborative links with government and with research providers in the public sector, extending current agricultural extension activities, and supporting the creation of demonstration farms.
- The levy bodies which make up AHDB also have an important role in utilising their levy funding to support applied research in their sector areas, where possible in collaboration with other public and private sector funders, and to support knowledge transfer activities.

“There is much that can be done to make sure that research is channelled in the direction in which it brings more rapid results and that extension is delivering knowledge based on what we do know, improve farmer uptake and get output efficiency rising again,” said Prof Leaver.

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#### **Notes to Editors:**

#### **About Royal Agricultural Society of England:**

Since 1838, The Royal Agricultural Society of England has played a leading role in the development of British agriculture and a vibrant rural economy through the uptake of good science, the promotion of best practice and a coordinated, impartial approach to wide-ranging rural issues. Today the Society's work includes support for business and social welfare in rural communities, education, and world famous shows and events

#### **For further information:**

Copies of the report can be found at [http://www.rase.org.uk/news-and-media/latest-news/PwS\\_Ag\\_Research\\_report.pdf](http://www.rase.org.uk/news-and-media/latest-news/PwS_Ag_Research_report.pdf)

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