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## News Release

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### Funding Threat to Future of Animal Science Highlighted

Continued cuts in spending on animal science could threaten the UK's ability to respond to national and global challenges. That is one of the main messages to be delivered by Professor Geoff Simm, President of the British Society of Animal Science (BSAS), at a reception at Westminster on Wednesday 12 March.

The reception will showcase some examples of the contribution that animal science has made globally and nationally in translating developments in biological science into practical benefits for animals, producers, consumers and the environment. And Professor Simm, a world-renowned sheep geneticist, will stress how new work is needed to meet challenges such as, feeding a growing world population, adapting to global climate change and sustaining our rural economy.

Professor Simm will say: "British animal science has achieved a great deal and we believe we need good animal science now more than ever.

"Global climate change is expected to reduce food production capability in many parts of the world – a particularly serious issue in the context of the growing global human population, and the expected doubling of global demand for livestock products in the first half of this century.

"However, agricultural productivity in Northern Europe is expected to be less affected by climate change, and may actually increase in places. These changes should increase the comparative advantage of livestock industries that produce a high quality product from land that is unsuitable for growing human food directly.

"While not wishing to diminish the livestock industry's current problems, this scenario creates both a tremendous need and a great commercial opportunity for the sector in the medium term. We need to ensure we still have the industry capability, and the science capability, to rise to these challenges.

"Science has a great deal to offer in improving the reliability of our prediction of climate change, understanding how this will affect our agriculture, and helping us to develop systems that cope with these changes while delivering quality products that respect the environment and animal welfare."

Last week Professor John Beddington, the UK government's chief scientific adviser, hit the headlines when he warned of a future food crisis and called for more agricultural research to help tackle the problem.

But Professor Simm will point out that animal science is potentially under threat due to lack of funding from government and other sources. “For the third year in succession, research funding is in the balance to help the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) to meet the costs of recent crises – contingency costs that we believe should not be met from a research budget.

“This follows cuts of approaching 20% in Defra animal science spending over the last decade.

“The future of several internationally-recognised UK animal science research groups depends on Defra funding. It takes decades to build such groups, and just a couple of years of underinvestment to seriously undermine them. We sincerely hope that ministers and senior Defra staff recognise the key role of Defra R&D funding in maintaining essential UK capacity in animal science.”

Funding from the red meat levy has declined by around 30 per cent over the same period and funding from the milk levy has declined by about 80 per cent in the last 5 years. Funding of animal science in the UK is well short of the EU target for overall research funding of approaching 3% of GDP by 2010.

The reception is being organised by the British Society of Animal Science (BSAS). Britain’s top animal scientists will get together with politicians, representatives of research funding bodies and the food and livestock industries. A similar event was held last month at Holyrood in Edinburgh and others are planned for 2009 in Cardiff and Belfast to raise awareness of the returns that animal science delivers on the investment of taxpayers’ and industry funds.

## **Ends**

**Notes :** 1. The British Society of Animal Science works to enhance the understanding of animal sciences and to promote their integration into economic and ethical systems. It is committed to improving the productivity and welfare of farm animals and the quality and safety of food, whilst protecting the environment. The BSAS has around 1,000 members from research, education, advisory work, industry and farming backgrounds with a wide range of interests.

2. Examples of the successes achieved by animal science are attached.

3. A photograph of Professor Simm is available from Maria Limonci.

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