History of The Bristol Center of Agricultural Innovation

In 1903 Lady Emily Smyth, wife of Sir Greville Smyth provided six hectares of land specifically for the creation of the National Institute of Fruit and Cider (NIFC). Situated in Long Ashton on the outskirts of Bristol, the initial aim of the NIFC was to help fruit farmers and cider-makers in the South-West improve their practices and hence productivity. Their success is clear to see today with Somerset cider arguably the best in the world.

In 1912 The NIFC became part of the University of Bristol, forming their Agricultural and Horticultural Research Department and so its name was changed to The Long Ashton Research Station. At that time Lady Emily Smyth provided further land, allowing expansion of the research conducted at the site, work in which she maintained an interest until her death in 1913.

The research conducted at Long Ashton has always been world class, with some very familiar developments along the way. When oranges became scarce during the Second World War the British government turned to the Long Ashton scientists to discover an alternative homegrown source of vitamin C. Their response was a blackcurrant drink sold the world over; Ribena. In the intervening years, the scope of research was further expanded to non-fruit crops such as wheat, research which continues to this day.

In 2003 Long Ashton Research Station closed, but the legacy and interests of Lady Smyth live on in the form of an endowed fund established from the sale of the original Lady Smyth land. In recognition of the desires of Lady Smyth, the School of Biological Sciences has established a “primary unit” (Ordinance 9), called the Lady Emily Smyth Agricultural Research Station (LESARS): the creation of this primary unit will enable formal links to be developed between University of Bristol staff with shared research interests in agricultural science.