



FACULTY OF AGRISCIENCES

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OVER THE PAST FEW YEARS the Faculty of Agrisciences has shown good growth, and 2009 was a year of consolidation of the past and repositioning for the positive future that lies ahead for agriculture.

A strategic shift to a stronger postgraduate focus has started to manifest itself. Undergraduate student numbers have started levelling out, while postgraduate numbers showed strong growth, particularly at the master's and doctoral level. Because of this, research funds and third-stream income grew significantly. Third-stream income in 2009 exceeded R90 million, and all indications are that it will grow even further. Publication outputs are also showing an increase. Here the Department of Conservation Ecology and Entomology deserves special mention, while the Departments of Food Science and Animal Sciences also made significant contributions.

The Faculty is in a strong position regarding liaison with and service to the agricultural industry. These relationships are expanding as the dependence on universities grows to provide research services. Particularly noticeable is that strategic partnerships and training in Africa are expanding considerably. The number of postgraduate students from Africa is increasing drastically and provides greater relevance to the role played by the University and by the Faculty on the continent. Cooperative agreements and exchanges with institutions all over Africa are in place and being expanded. New partnerships in Asia also hold great potential for cooperation and service provision in Africa and elsewhere. The emphasis on agricultural development in Africa has meant that prominent academics of the Faculty regularly serve in forums, projects, workshops and other initiatives related to development in Africa. Existing agreements with bodies in Europe, the USA and Asia have also been ratified and are still being adhered to.

The diversity of staff and students is one of the most important challenges facing the Faculty. Only 12% of the permanent teaching staff and 20% of the students are from the designated groups. This arises from a deeper-lying issue, being that the agricultural sciences are not experienced as a sought-after occupation among black South Africans. Food security, investments in agribusiness and the industrialisation of agriculture are among the factors that will gradually change this situation. Concerted efforts are being made in all the departments to encourage diversity and to improve the profile. There has been greater emphasis on student recruitment and funds have been obtained in collaboration with various agribusinesses for bursaries and support for students from the designated groups. In this regard, the Rural Child Project is

one specific initiative, supporting the children of farm workers and other employees in agriculture to undertake further studies. The Faculty has high regard for all the agribusinesses that have contributed to these initiatives and believes they will bring about growth in and a better future for agriculture and the learners.

The Overarching Strategic Plan (OSP) enabled the Faculty to pay more attention to infrastructure and facilities. Good progress has already been made with the refurbishment of the JH Neethling Building. Funds were also obtained for upgrading at the Department of Food Science to prepare the discipline for better service delivery and growth. The upgrading of the Lombardi Building has been completed, creating better facilities for the Departments of Horticultural Science, Plant Pathology and Soil Science. The Chair in Postharvest Technology was instituted and is based in the AI Perold Building. The fruit industry provided funding to create new facilities for the study of insects at the Welgevallen Experimental Farm.

In addition to the infrastructure funded by the OSP, funding was also allocated to the Faculty for the establishment of an Agricultural Development Project. The project focuses on technology transfer, mentorship and providing agribusiness advice to bring about transformation in the agricultural sector. The Faculty also participated in strategic projects based in other faculties, such as the Rural Clinical School and the Food Security Project of the Faculty of Health Sciences and the NEPAD Water Centre of Excellence of the Faculty of Science.

The nature of agricultural teaching and research means that community interaction forms an integral part of service to different industries and communities. In addition to the traditional, close interaction with the commodity sectors, interactions with rural communities are being expanded considerably. Support services for emerging farmers are provided in a variety of disciplines and in collaboration with the authorities and nongovernmental organisations. Staff members are also regularly involved in the training, mentorship and, particularly, recruitment of entrepreneurs and learners.

The Faculty has built further on the cooperative agreement with Elsenburg. Although the autonomy of the Institute is acknowledged, the Faculty plays an ever stronger role in the quality assurance of its teaching. The Faculty of Agrisciences remains committed to the support and improvement of teaching at Elsenburg.