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REVIEW:

NEW INITIATIVES IN AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS EDUCATION AT THE UNIVERSITY OF THE NORTH¹

T.I. Fényes²

Agricultural economics education at the University of the North started in 1976 when the present reviewer became head of the newly established department. This development has led to the gradual establishment of a fully-fledged Faculty of Agriculture. The department produced the first M.Sc. (Agric-economics) degree in 1983 and the recipient was the current acting vice-chancellor, Prof Charles Machethe.

Today the staff component comprises of four full-time staff members and one part time lecturer.

Recently the development has finalised a new B.Sc. and M.Sc. Agricultural Economics programmes which will be implemented in the 2001 academic year. It is interesting to note that these programmes were finalised in the new atmosphere of openness and participation with stakeholders. The undergraduate program was also revised and adapted to suit South Africa's present and future economic, social and environmental needs.

Undergraduate students can choose between a three-year Bachelor of Agriculture in Administration (B. Agric. Admin) and a four-year Bachelor of Science in Agriculture (B.Sc. Agric).

Postgraduate students can enroll for Honours, Masters and Doctoral degrees. Areas of specialisation are farm management and production economics, agricultural marketing and rural development.

The following courses are offered:

¹ Information for this review was provided by Dr B Hedden-Dunkhorst (Acting Head: Department of Agricultural Economics, University of the North)

² Editor-in-Chief: Agrekon.

Undergraduate level:

- Introduction to Agricultural Economics
- Farm Management and Agricultural Marketing
- Agricultural and Rural Development
- Agrarian Institutions
- Agricultural Production and Land Resource Economics
- Applied Statistics and Econometrics

Postgraduate level:

- Intermediate Micro- and Macroeconomics
- Quantitative Methods
- Mathematical Economics and Agricultural Business Management
- Agricultural Marketing and Policy Analysis
- Agricultural Development Theory and Project Analysis
- Research Methodology

Research:

Communal land ownership and livestock production in the Northern Province, South Africa

The main objective of this research project is to look at the crucial issue of how livestock are managed on communal land - a topic which has widespread relevance over much of Southern Africa. The focus of the project is to investigate possible efficient management systems that can be recommended to communities to control land degradation in rural areas of South Africa and elsewhere.

Principle Researcher: FDK Anim

The adoption of soil conservation measures: The case of small-scale farmers in the Northern Province of South Africa

The primary aims of this study are to evaluate the adoption of selected soil conservation practices among small-scale farmers in the Northern Province and to investigate the relative influence of farmers perceptions on the choice of soil conservation practices used to reduce soil erosion.

Principle Researcher: FDK Anim

Market-orientation and diversification: Strategies for improving smallholder's welfare in the Northern Province, South Africa

Earlier findings from numerous countries showed that commercialisation of smallholder agriculture had a positive impact on income generation and food security. This project aims to analyse the impact of market-orientation and diversification on smallholder's welfare in South Africa's Northern Province. In addition alternative policies which can support the process of commercialisation will be evaluated.

Principle Researcher: B Hedden-Dunkhorst

Sustainable local management of smallholder irrigation in South Africa: A case study of the Arabie Olifants River Irrigation Scheme

This multidisciplinary project aims to identify effective local management structures which guarantee higher productivity and profitability, gender equality and environmental sustainability in smallholder irrigation schemes. The project is carried out in collaboration with the International Water Management Institute.

Principle Researchers from the Department of Agricultural Economics: CL Machethe and B Hedden-Dunkhorst

The structure, conduct and performance of the agro-industry in the Northern Province, South Africa

The broad objective of the study is to provide a better understanding of the agro-industry sector in the Northern Province with regard to its structure, conduct and performance primarily in terms of employment generation.

Principle Researcher: CL Machethe

The impact of farmer's cooperatives and associations on smallholder's income and food security in the Northern Province, South Africa

The project focuses on analysing the structure, conduct and performance of small-scale farmer's cooperatives and associations. It attempts to estimate the impact of management and performance features of these institutions on member's production, access to markets and input supply. The project also aims to evaluate to impact of membership on smallholder's overall livelihood.

Principle Researcher: NP Moletsane

Staff members are involved in a number of research projects related to smallholder agriculture, primarily in the Northern Province. They include:

Community Outreach

Community Outreach becomes more and more important for the Department. We are involved with outreach at various levels. On the "grassroot" level we took part in farmer's field-days and organised exposure trips for farmers. On the provincial level close co-operation has developed with the Northern Province Department of Agriculture and Environment in numerous aspects related to agricultural economics. Co-operation also exists with the National Department of Agriculture in the area of food security, together with the SADC/Regional Food Security Training Project. We organised a national workshop on food security last year and plan to offer a training course on food processing and food marketing towards the end of this year. Besides, staff members are working on curricula for various short- and medium-term training courses.

According to the acting HOD: there are huge opportunities and challenges for agricultural economists at training institutions, in the areas of teaching and learning, research and outreach. In these days of limited resources (financial and possibly more seriously, human resources), I think we somehow need to improve on more collaboration among training institutions.

Linkages

The Department has recently established linkages with the:

- German Academic Exchange Service: Financial support for a long-term visiting lecturer and two bursaries for masters students and
- International Water Management Institute: funding of a student research project;
- CIRAD, France, signed co-operation agreement and
- The Faculty of Agriculture signed co-operation agreement with the International Water Management Institute of Sri Lanka.

Further information can be obtained from the acting Head of the Department, Dr B Hedden-Dunkhorst. E-Mail: dunkhorst@unin.unorth.ac.za

In the next issue I will review new initiatives in Agricultural Economics education at the University of Fort Hare.