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REVIEW:

NEW INITIATIVES IN AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS EDUCATION AT THE UNIVERSITY OF STELLENBOSCH¹

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Agricultural education at Stellenbosch has a long and proud history.

The Agricultural school of the Victoria College of Stellenbosch started in 1887 with five students. It was transferred to Elsenburg in 1898, but in 1918 it was reinstated as the Faculty of Agriculture of the University of Stellenbosch. Student numbers have increased with 34% from 1994 to 1998. Another interesting phenomenon is that over 30% of recent student intake has been women.

The faculty of Agricultural Sciences of the University of Stellenbosch is committed to providing training at internationally accepted level. With its unique geographical location and strong support received from different bodies and industries, the University is capable of meeting its objectives successfully. Prof MJ Hattingh has just retired as Dean after seven years of service and has given over to Prof L van Huyssteen, previously Head ARC Research Institute for Fruit, Vine & Wine.

Three main initiatives of the Department of Agricultural Economics will be highlighted; The Agrifutura project, including SADC; The Department of Land Affairs Work and the M.Phil Programme.

1. AGRIFUTURA, AN AGRICULTURAL FUTURES PROJECT

Agrifutura is a co-operative project between the Department of Agricultural Economics of the University of Stellenbosch and the Department of Agriculture: Western Cape. Agrifutura is an environmental scanning project aimed at nurturing insight into and understanding of the strategic environment that affects the agricultural sector. It is also a research and

¹ Information for this review was provided by Prof N Vink (Chair: Department of Agricultural Economics, US).

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information service for management and policy makers in the agricultural sector.

The main publication, is the *Agrifutura*, a synoptic publication, providing information for strategic planning and policy formulation to both private and public agricultural-related organisations. The publication gives an overview of short-, medium- and long-term trends, not only in South Africa, but also in Southern Africa. The following are some of the aspects which are dealt with in the various chapters:

- **Social environment** (social groups, demographic trends, urbanisation and its impact on agriculture, employment, human development, poverty, crime).
- **Physical-biological environment** (trends in the use of natural resources, the implications of the availability of resources, biodiversity, atmospheric and climatic changes, and environmental issues).
- **Political-institutional environment** (the interaction between the political environment, agriculture and the economy, structural adjustment in the South African agriculture, world agricultural trade: markets and policy).
- **Technological environment** (patterns and trends in agricultural technology, bio technology, and development in the technology of agricultural meganisation, the sustainability of agricultural research in South Africa).
- **Economic environment** (long-term change in the South African economy and implications for agriculture, the competitiveness and productivity of the South African agricultural sector, importance of agriculture to the various provinces).

Quartely newsletters on strategic issues are also published by the Project. The purposes of the *Agrifutura* publications are to stimulate thought and debate in the changing agricultural environment and to give direction in strategies to be developed.

The **Southern African Development Community (SADC) Project** is a sub-project of *Agrifutura*.

The SADC Agricultural Potential Assessment Project consists of several parts.

1. SADC Agricultural Potential Assessment: Country Profiles (report I). The first report gives a socio-economic description of the SADC region and of each member country.
2. A description of the physical, climatological and some infrastructural features of the agricultural resources of SADC countries, are described in Report II. (To be published in August 1999)The data on these features were captured in a geographic information system (GIS).
3. The development of a crop suitability model, which is applicable for the resource data sets on a regional level.
4. The development of crop suitability maps.
5. Transport modelling, the supply side of which is based on the crop suitability maps.

The Development Bank of Southern Africa financed the major components. Collaboration was maintained between the US and the SADC-Sector coordinating offices, especially the Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources Sector, as well as other SADC National Ministries

2. PROVINCIAL DEPARTMENT OF LAND AFFAIRS: WESTERN CAPE (PDLA:WC)

A large portion of land reform projects in the Western Cape is of an agricultural nature. The Department of Agricultural Economics was awarded the tender to provide the PDLA:WC with agricultural economics support services.

The functions and responsibilities of the Department of Agricultural Economics in this regard include:

- Provide support to the planning staff of the PDLA:WC;
- Develop a structured training programme to facilitate the transfer of skills to PDLA:WC staff;
- Conduct, co-ordinate and evaluate agriculture assessments/evaluations;
- Assist planning staff with the compilation and evaluation of business plans;

- Develop a network of appropriate institutions/organisations/individuals, including Department of Agriculture, in order to secure further support and to ensure that extension services are available to land reform beneficiaries.
- Investigate opportunities for leveraging other sources of funding for land reform/agricultural projects;
- Develop a system that ensures that land reform beneficiaries receive effective and efficient development assistance;
- Provide, co-ordinate and monitor extension services to land reform beneficiaries;
- Engage with land reform policy and make recommendations thereon.
- The two-year contract is over 19 months, terminating 31 March 2000.

3. M. PHIL. IN AGRICULTURAL SYSTEMS MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

A new modular Masters course in interdisciplinary studies in agriculture was initiated in 1998. It is called a M. Phil in Agricultural Systems Management. The course is intended for project managers and a considerable portion of this course is devoted to Farming systems, Extension, Sustainability, and participatory research in the developing agricultural sector. To this end the Faculty has been successful in attracting 10 black students (1999), 3 of which are women. In the academic year more than half of the honours group consists of foreign students. This is significant given that both are under-represented in the aggregate student composition in the agricultural faculty. The course is therefore also strategic in promoting access to appropriate studies in agriculture at post-graduate level for previously disadvantaged individuals at a reputed, but traditional white university.

The Department was also successful in establishing cooperation with the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences. Prof David Gibbon, an expert in small farm systems, presented several lectures. Other international universities participating in the programme includes the University of Wageningen in the Netherlands.

More information on the Department could be obtained from the University of Stellenbosch's web site: www.sun.ac.za