Departments in the Agricultural Sciences
Overview

The approach of the Department of Agricultural Economics is to equip students to be outstanding agricultural economists and to contribute to community service through research and the practical application of their knowledge. In 2007 the department continued to improve curricula, add new incentives and apply knowledge in various research projects linked to the industry and the fields of expertise of staff.

Altogether, 21 M.Sc. and 21 Ph.D. students enrolled for studies in the department. This includes students from Eritrea, Mozambique, Nigeria, Namibia, Botswana, Lesotho, Ethiopia, Swaziland, Ghana and South Africa, amongst others.

Prof. Klopper Oosthuizen was appointed by the International Commission on Irrigation and Drainage to lead a symposium in Lahore, Pakistan on socio-economic aspects of agricultural production in developing countries. Dr Wimpie Nell was elected as a member of the council of the International Farm Management Association (IFMA) to represent Southern Africa.

Prof. Johan Willemse, Departmental Chairperson, was appointed as an independent non-executive director of the Absa Group and vice-chairperson of the Agricultural Economics Association of South Africa (AEASA).

The 20th FR Tolinson commemorative lecture of the AEASA was hosted by the department and Prof. Oosthuizen received an honorary medal.

Staff of the department attended the 16th International Farm Management Conference in Cork, Ireland.

During 2007, the Centre for Agricultural Management was appointed by the national Department of Agriculture as a Centre of Excellence for the roll-out of small, medium and micro enterprises (SMME). The UFS was one of three educational institutions identified to host such a Centre of Excellence. The first course for extension officers commenced in November 2007.

Most of the work and research at the department is done on a group basis, although individual research is also done extensively. The research team of Prof. Giel Viljoen consists of Drs Godfrey Kundhlande and Jack Armour, Mr Mompoti Baiphethi and Ms Heidi Mabannda. The team’s research focuses on the generation of information to improve efficiency and sustainability in the use and management of natural resources, water and land. Research focus areas include assessing the impacts and management of natural disasters like floods and droughts, saline irrigation water and rain water harvesting techniques.

Two students graduated from the group in 2007, namely Mr Armour who received a Ph.D. degree with a dissertation entitled: Multi-dimensional models for the sustainable management of water quantity and quality in the Orange-Vaal-Riet convergence system and Ms Mabannda, who received a master’s degree with a mini-dissertation entitled: An assessment of the role and influence of commodity and financial markets on the sustainable adoption of the in-field rainwater harvesting (IRWH) technique by resource poor small scale farmers in Thaba Nchu.

The initiative of the department to support educators and to enable them to prepare their learners to meet the National Curriculum Standards in Economics and Management Sciences (EMS) at the General Education and Training (GET) level and Economics at the Further Education and Training (FET) level was established in 2007. This initiative is carried out in cooperation with the provincial Department of Education, the National Council of Economic Education (NCEE) in the United States of America (USA) and the South African Foundation for Economic and Financial Education (SAFEFE). In this case, SAFEFE will play a role similar to that of the South African Mathematics Foundation.

At international level various activities were funded by the NCEE. 31 South Africans from six provinces (19 staff members of the provincial departments of education and 12 UFS staff members) completed the Train the Trainers programme; 53 South Africans from six provinces were selected to participate in the first all-South African Train the Trainers programme; eight graduates of the Train the Trainer programme were selected to participate in the NCEE year-long Train the Writer programme (including a one-week workshop in Bucharest, Romania); the NCEE hosted a delegation of four education leaders from the Free State and KwaZulu-Natal in the USA and two graduates of the Train the Trainers programme from the Free State were invited to the USA for a study tour. Other activities included: graduates of the Train the Trainers programme were supported through three alumni projects; an introductory teachers’ workshop was conducted in KwaZulu-Natal for 45 participants; and five educational leaders from the Free State and
KwaZulu-Natal were hosted at the 2007 NCEE annual conference in Denver, Colorado in the USA.

At local level various activities were carried out by SAFEFE. This included an Economic Literacy Olympiad which was introduced for the first time to all 1 300 GET schools in the Free State. The Olympiad was conducted over four rounds. More than 400 teachers and 2 500 learners were involved. The plan is to expand the project to include 200 schools in the Northern Cape and to have an inter-provincial competition. In another project 123 Learning Area Managers and Subject Advisors in the Northern Cape and 77 FET teachers in the Free State were trained. Ten lessons were developed for the foundation phase at GET level and presented to 78 Learning Facilitators in the Free State and KwaZulu-Natal. An NCEE alumni project in the Eastern Cape was approved to develop an Olympiad for Economics at FET level in 2008. In November 2007, 120 GET teachers were trained. Pre- and post-testing was conducted which will be followed up with pre- and post-testing of their learners for research purposes.

It is important that the UFS develops extensive engagement with learners from pre-school up until Grade 12 regarding research, teaching and outreach that touches all parts of the university and includes programmes that represent the best in partnerships – enduring, collaborative, complementary and focused on issues of importance to the UFS and the Free State.

The department continues to excel in community service. Many of the research projects have a strong community service component. These specifically include contact sessions on the Main Campus with the SADC PRINT project, in which the countries of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) participate.

A unit for Livestock and Wildlife Economics was established in the department during 2007, focusing on research. The team consists of Prof. Kobus Laubscher, Messrs Pieter Taljaard, David Spies and Flippie Cloete.

Prof. Willemse and his research assistant Ms Lize Terblanche conduct quarterly Market Outlook Workshops for farmers and agri businesses. These workshops were well attended (averaging 300 attendees) by farmers from throughout South Africa. Guest speakers included Mr Neil Jacobson, a director from Future World, and Ms Chantelle Ilbury, co-author of Games Foxes Play - Planning for Extraordinary Times. They also presented agricultural economic market and scenario presentations to farmer groups and assisted various agricultural organisations in this regard.

The Centre for Agricultural Management presented two financial management courses to a total of 22 farmers and one strategic management course to 11 farmers. The centre also coordinated one three-day dairy processing course attended by six people, and one course in the processing of meat, attended by 27 people. A farm management course was presented to ten farmers at the Lengau Agricultural Development Centre.

The centre is also involved in assisting the Lower Majaegkoro Trust with business plans and training. Three courses were presented to the ten farmers of the Trust, namely Farm Management, Horticultural Management and the Management of the Finances of a farming business.

A Food Garden Management course was presented by the Centre for Agricultural Management during December 2007. Also attending the training course were three dietician students from the UFS. Because of their engagement at the Bothshabelo District Hospital, the students requested the centre to help them start a food garden at the hospital.

A short course on vermiculture and vermicomposting at the Mangaung University Community Partnership Programme (MUCPP) was attended by 17 people. The vermicomposting project at MUCPP is growing well and will be expanded to the Tshwaraganang Garden Project and the MUCPP Health Centre. As a result of this course a manual has been written. The centre has since been contacted by various community projects and individuals for assistance in starting vermicomposting.

Dr Ntsikane Maine was guest speaker at the first women’s seminar held by the student chapter of the Black Management Forum (BMF) at the UFS. The BMF’s student chapter was launched at the UFS in 2006.

Students in the department excelled at the 45th Annual Conference of the AEASA held in Johannesburg. The organising committee received 53 paper submissions, of which 35 were selected for presentation at the conference. Of the 35 papers, 15 were from students of the department, including one upgraded paper.

Students and lecturers who participated in the conference received various awards: Prof. Johan Willemse, Messrs Pieter Taljaard and Dirkie Strydom received the first prize for the best poster, Mr Henry Jordaan received the first prize for the best master’s thesis, Messrs Jordaan and Bennie Grové received the third prize for the best paper, and Ms Leandré du Preez was awarded the prize...
for the best Agricultural Economics student at the UFS.

The department hosted two visiting professors from the USA, namely Prof. Rodney Smith from the University of Minnesota. Three students from Dronen Professional Agricultural University in the Netherlands also visited the department.

Third-year students of the department had to take part in a competition as part of a course in Marketing. The students had to manage the price of white mealies for delivery in July 2007 by buying and selling on Safex. The competition ran from 25 April 2007 to 25 May 2007. During this period, the market grew from R1 650 to R1 712 per ton. The winning group achieved a price of R1 777 per ton, thereby beating the market by R65 per ton or almost 4%. From the left are: Messrs Llewellyn Eastman, member of the winning group, Frikkie Maré, member of the winning group, Willem Zwiegers, leader of the winning group, Dr Kit le Clus, Professor Extraordinary at the department, and Mr Pieter Taljaard, Lecturer at the department.

Research outputs

Research articles


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Four educators from South Africa recently visited the National Council on Economic Education (NCEE) in the United States of America (USA) on an exchange programme to study economic education delivery systems. The NCEE is a non-profit educational organisation in the USA with a nationwide network of university-based centres for economic education. The South African delegation met with the department of education in Minnesota, staff from the national department of education in Washington DC and representatives of the South African Embassy, amongst others. From the left are: Dr Patty Elder, Vice-President: International Economics of the NCEE, Ms Faith Ndaba, Chief Director: Curriculum Management, Department of Education in the Free State, Dr Thula Mbatha, Chief Director: Curriculum, Department of Education, KwaZulu-Natal, Representative Betty McCollum, Education and Related Matters in Washington DC, Prof. Klopper Oosthuizen, from the department, Dr Nhlanhla Ngcobo, Director: Teacher Development, Department of Education in KwaZulu-Natal, and Prof. Claudia Parliament, Executive Director: Minnesota Council on Economic Education.

Prof. Klopper Oosthuizen delivered a paper during the FR Tomlinson Commemorative Lecture on the Main Campus in Bloemfontein entitled: Economics education: aspirations and responsibilities of the profession. The commemorative lecture is presented by the Agricultural Economics Association of South Africa (AEASA) to give recognition to contributions made to the Agricultural Economics discipline in South Africa. Attending the lecture are, from the left: Mr Niel Pretorius, Provincial Manager: Agriculture, Standard Bank, Dr Moraka Makhura, President of AEASA, and Prof. Oosthuizen with an award he received from the AEASA.


Conference contributions


Jordaan, H. & Grove, B. 2007. Investigating factors affecting the forward pricing behaviour of

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