

At The End of My Presidency

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Since the start of my presidency in 2006, the demand for agricultural products has increased because of the rise in income in the Far Eastern countries. Also the effects of climate change have resulted in the increasing need for agricultural raw products for the production of bioenergy. Better prices for agricultural

products have caused the growth in the demand for products from the agricultural engineering industry. Agricultural engineering is experiencing an upturn in business comparable with the levels of the 1960s. In the agricultural engineering press we read comments such as: *Without agricultural engineering there is not enough food for the people, nor is there enough energy for the everyday activities and care* and: *Agricultural raw products are proud ears not any more mournful wallflowers.* (Moos-Nüssli, 3 Feb 2008, Schweizer Landtechnik, editorial)

The discussion *food or fuel* is topical in public debate and in international organizations such as FAO, the World Bank and IMF are concerned about food prices in developing countries. Radical statements such as *We have to stop the production of bioenergy from grain* can be read in newspapers. It is important to take account of sustainability for the production of energy, not only with regard to the emission of greenhouse gases but also for the 850 million people who do not have enough money for their daily food.

In this article I have therefore concentrated on three subjects: cooperation with industry, university study in agricultural and biosystems engineering and EurAgEng activities.

Industry and EurAgEng

In 2007, the AgEng 2007 / LAND.TECHNIK Conference *Engineering Solutions for Energy and Food Production* was organised by VDI-MEG and EurAgEng together. In the press both the content and the

participation were well received. A combination of a 1½ day international conference and an international agricultural engineering exhibition appeared to be a good formula, and close cooperation between EurAgEng and VDI-MEG on these matters paid dividends.

EurAgEng is convinced that the international participation of agricultural engineers from universities and research institutions should grow. For the profession of agricultural and biosystems engineering to prosper it is necessary to build good relations with industry so that cooperation in innovative projects can be developed. Vital agricultural engineering and technologies are important for the universities because of jobs for the graduates.



Today in R&D and in industry there is a shortage of engineers. This is both a challenge and a threat for the agricultural and biosystems engineering departments of the universities. However, we know that innovations based on science, technology and practice are crucial for the market position of companies. A well-known saying is: *Nothing is more practical than a good theory.* Cooperation among scientists (basic and applied), engineers who make the innovations happen and the workers with practical skills and knowledge is important for all agricultural engineers.

Education in Agricultural and Biosystems Engineering

It is often said that *the steam engine did more for thermodynamics than thermodynamics for the steam engine*, which is true for many agricultural engineering applications (CW Hall, 1992 *The Literature of*

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Agricultural Engineering, CW Hall and WC Olsen (eds) Cornell University Press). The Thematic Network *University Studies of Agricultural Engineering Studies in Europe, USAEE-TN*, proposed the definition of “an application-based discipline related to the production and processing of goods of biological origin from the field and the farm to the consumer”. Today the new

ERABEE TN thematic network is named **ERABEE-TN Education and Research in Biosystems Engineering or Agricultural and Biological Engineering in Europe** and is coordinated by Prof Briassoulis from Greece. The transition to biosystems engineering and the harmonisation in European higher education are important issues. EurAgEng urges universities to participate in the Thematic Network.

In the past, the discipline of agricultural and biological engineering has encountered difficulties. University departments have had problems in attracting enough students and research institutions have been closing down, been merged or at best, had their budgets cut. However, the demand for agronomists and agricultural engineers is so high that we are not able to deliver sufficient graduates. Another positive point is that companies are interested in the curricula of bachelors and masters education in agricultural and biological engineering (see VDI-MEG publication in German).

Some years ago there was an initiative for Hohenheim, Leuven, Uppsala and Wageningen to develop the basis for European cooperation in Bachelor and Masters degrees in Biosystems Engineering, but today there is little to show for it. However in my opinion if we are willing to give new vitality to our profession we must look further than national interests. The aim of European Bachelors and Masters degrees in Biosystems Engineering should not be too far away if we are willing to maintain a competitive agricultural engineering discipline and university education.

EurAgEng activities

Agricultural engineers can be characterised as people who make innovations and inventions happen in science, in industry and in practice. They tend not to care too much about the public relations of their work. Today we know that public relations is important to maintain and improve our position in society and it is important that we can be found if authorities or other administrators are willing to support our work. The Executive of EurAgEng has supported the work on publicity by the European Institutes for Agricultural and Environmental

Engineering Research (ENGAGE) and in the future EurAgEng will maintain a publicity website. Work on our image both in EU directorates and also in the public media is a high priority for us. It would help if more contributions from our members to our Newsletter were submitted to Mike Hurst (see below for contact details). It certainly would improve our profile with the decision makers and policy builders.

Our AgEng conferences are the most important activities for our members. I invite our members to participate more in the preparation of the conferences in organising sessions on topics of current interest and opening exchanges of information. The AgEng conferences should be utilised more to produce position papers for EU authorities. Within EurAgEng the structure of the working groups is available and can help to carry out this work. I know that the agricultural engineering departments and institutes have difficulties in achieving the targets for peer reviewed articles. Our conferences will help to implement the paper acceptance procedure through peer reviews.



AgEng2006 in Bonn

Conclusion

The end of my term as president of the European Society of Agricultural Engineers is now in sight. During the meeting of the EurAgEng Council at AgEng 2008 I will pass on the chairmanship to Florentino Juste from Spain. He has lengthy experience in agricultural and biosystems engineering research and I am convinced that he will serve EurAgEng with the same efforts and pleasure as I have done. I thank all EurAgEng members for their confidence and wish you all the best, and of course I will follow EurAgEng with much interest.

Comments are welcome to
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