



In the Czech Lands (The Kingdom of Bohemia) agriculture has been on a highly reputed level since the Middle Ages and such tradition was based on proper education and application of Europe-wide experience. Geographic location of Bohemia and Moravia used to be a crossroads of many trade routes which facilitated the exchange of seeds, plants, animal breeds as well as know-how. Church-owned and aristocratic farm holdings also used to be managed on a level corresponding to the European standard.

Since the 15th century there has been a clear move from empirical principles of farming, disseminated by the word of mouth, towards written experiences and recommendations for individual farming industries (e.g. the Czech translation of the famous book *Crescentius Bohemus* of 1486, made by Jan Brtín, Mikuláš Černobyl, around 1540).

The need to move towards more intensive farming methods opened the way for the emerging agricultural sciences based on natural sciences - and the foundation of educational institutions. Such institutions were first established on church farms within monasteries (The Břevnov Monastery Farm School, 1728) and on holdings belonging to aristocratic families).



The era of Enlightened Absolutism brought a number of rules and regulations leading to the edification of agriculture and the introduction of progressive farming methods. The efficiency of these methods, however, was rather low in the then Austro-Hungarian Empire. An important turning point in the process of gradual introduction of progressive ideas and know-how in agriculture was the foundation in 1769 of the Society for the Enhancement of Ploughing and Free Arts, which was later raised to become the Patriotic-Economic Society in the Kingdom of Bohemia.

The Society asked the Imperial Court in Vienna in 1771 to establish the Chair of Agriculture at the Faculty of Philosophy of Charles University in Prague. (Charles University was founded in 1348 by Charles IV, the Emperor of Rome and King of Bohemia, the first university in Central Europe, north of the Alps). Independent agricultural department was founded in 1788. Later, the department merged with the Technical College (now Czech Technical University) where it existed from 1906 as a Faculty with a four-year course.

After the foundation of independent Czechoslovakia in 1918 the Czech Technical College was restructured to form an association of schools of higher learning, one of which was the University of Agriculture and Forestry in Prague. Thus it existed until 1938 when, following the Nazi occupation, all schools of higher learning were closed. After 1945 the school resumed its work in badly devastated premises, and in 1952 the University of Agriculture was finally established as one of the independent technical universities.



Nowadays, the school has four faculties: agronomy, forestry, economics and management, and technical. The Institute of Tropical and Subtropical Agriculture and the Institute of Applied Ecology also belong to the University. Linked with the University is Unico-Agric, a consultancy and engineering establishment. Two other companies operate from the University premises, namely Agronet, a. s., providing agricultural information systems in agricultural commodities, and Libera, a consultancy and trade firm for organic farming.

After 17th November 1989 the University has returned to its national and democratic traditions. The restitution of academic freedoms, including self-governance through the Academic Senate, is an important element in this respect.

The new political and economic situation in the whole of the society and in agriculture in particular (privatisation and economic transformation) has been reflected by the University management in the new development strategy under the changed conditions. The know-how and experience from foreign universities have been used



in this process, and namely the evaluation carried out by colleagues from the Wageningen Agricultural University in the Netherlands, under the leadership of Rector prof. Van der Plas, was of paramount importance.

The evaluation was made thoroughly in all departments of the University. It facilitated the disclosure and removal of insufficiencies and problem spots in the organisation and in the contents of the process of education and it helped the University to adapt itself to the reshaped conditions in the agricultural and food sector. Now we can already see the fulfillment of the tasks based on the above described conception or strategy of the school's development and on the conclusions of the University Evaluation Report. For instance, the foreign-language proficiency of students and staff has increased considerably, just as the use of foreign technical information from the western countries, or the shaping of new contacts with the countries in Eastern Europe. A considerable improvement has been achieved in the technical equip-



ment and computer technology, and the previously missing disciplines in the education of specialists in market economy have been introduced together with higher level of humanities, ecology, economic and both general and special education.

All this creates prerequisites for the school's transition towards a university-type school of higher learning which we hope to become reality in the Czech Agricultural University in Prague. Scientific and research activities have been developing rapidly thanks to a large number of grants received recently. Foreign grants have also been considerable which is a proof of the University's high repute abroad.

We should use this opportunity to express our thanks and gratitude to many foreign universities and institutions for their help and cooperation. We have become editors of this scientific publication, printed in English, with the view of presenting our scientific results and achievements in international cooperation. We hope that its scientific value will help to open the doors and book shelves in libraries and offices in agricultural universities and institutions throughout the world.

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