

Agricultural University of Plovdiv: The expert gene bank of Bulgarian agriculture

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The higher state educational institution celebrated its 70th anniversary with life wisdom, proven authority, and a unique identity, with its avant-garde interactive intellectual and scientific product, and with a vision for the long-term successful perspective of its conceptual strategy for the sustainability of academic growth within the European agricultural space.

This exceptionally exciting, special event with great significance in the calendar of the Agricultural University was at the center of attention for the national agricultural community and academic circles. The anniversary celebration – 70 years since the establishment of the higher state educational institution in Plovdiv – was honored by the Minister of Agriculture and Food Desislava Taneva, Hristo Grudev, Regional Governor of Plovdiv, Prof. Totka Trifonova, Chairperson of the Agricultural Academy, members of the University Board of Trustees Dimitar Katrandzhiev and

Rosen Chatalbashev, Lili Valcheva, Chairperson of the CITUB "Higher Education" Federation. Special guests at the remarkable event were H.E. the Ambassador of Kazakhstan, the First Secretary of the Russian Embassy in Bulgaria, the Consul General of Turkey in Plovdiv, and the Honorary Consul of Italy in Plovdiv. To share in the occasion in the ceremonial hall were the rectors of the agricultural universities in Szczecin and Krakow, Poland, Edirne, Turkey, Moscow State University "Lomonosov" and the Institute of Soil Science in Moscow. The anniversary celebration was attended by former lecturers, deans, and rectors of the university, rectors of many institutes and universities from across the country, directors of professional agricultural high schools, university alumni – now leading agribusinessmen, specialists, experts. The student representation was also impressive.

In his academic address, the Rector of the Agricultural University Prof. Dr. Dimitar Grekov emphasized several key points united in the slogan **The 70th Anniversary – A Chronicle of Strength and Energy for the Future**. He noted: "In the history of the university, written over seven decades, there are many things we are justifiably proud of: **continuity** – among our students there is a third generation of agronomists trained at the Agricultural University in Plovdiv; **employment success** - 80% of our graduates start work after graduation and most of them quickly assume high and key positions; **lasting links between education, science, and business; innovation and flexibility** – the bachelor's programs are now 17, and the master's – 34, to cover the entire spectrum of specialties needed for modern agriculture." Prof. Grekov paid special attention to the academic atmosphere at the Agricultural University. He interpreted it as a favorable environment for liberated and avant-garde thinking. Building an elite educational institution, which the Agricultural University undoubtedly is, depends on the style and quality of work, with the material base and the high self-confidence of the lecturers playing a primary role. The Agricultural University Plovdiv provides an academic product in the three-cycle higher education – bachelor, master, and doctor, and lifelong learning for the qualification enhancement of specialists.

The university's scientific policy includes active support and assistance for the implementation of research programs and projects, which aim to support the development of agriculture and tourism with scientific products, their integration into the European economic space, based on knowledge and expert competence.

The management culture of the Agricultural University acknowledges the importance of public resonance. The clear institutional concept and the approach of transparency and openness under conditions of full autonomy help the positive assessments from government structures, businesses, partner universities, and research centers in the country and abroad. In 2013, the university received its latest institutional accreditation with an exceptionally high evaluation from the NEAA, valid until 2019.

Part of the academic and teaching work at the university is missionary, emphasized Prof. Grekov. Providing quality education, student-oriented, guaranteeing competitiveness in the Bulgarian, European, and international labor market. Scientific research oriented towards rapid

implementation in practice. Building personalities with a clear civic stance and expert potential, capable of formulating policies and strategies for sustainable growth of the agricultural sector.

Prof. Grekov thanked the university management teams, who in the years of transition from centralized management of agriculture to farming managed very quickly and successfully to redefine the educational process, to transform it, to tune it to the right wavelength. Today, the Agricultural University, according to the assessment of the academic community and management institutions, is a leading educational unit, part of the European educational system.

The new technological environment requires a new way of thinking, a focus on new skills and practices, constant development, a high degree of flexibility. And one more thing – we are becoming increasingly diverse and international, multicultural, project-oriented, working in a dynamic environment, with short deadlines," emphasized Prof. Grekov.

An emotional address to the teaching staff of the Agricultural University, the students, and the guests was made by Minister Desislava Taneva. She noted that the Agricultural University, the emblem of agricultural education in Bulgaria, is a unique scientific complex in terms of its management philosophy and the values in its activities. This phenomenal format with its own identity, authenticity, and recognizability creates innovative, ambitious, and quality specialists. And this is, Minister Taneva concluded, a model example with a sustainable trend for successful personnel provision of our agricultural production. The graduates of the university, Minister Taneva emphasized, are active and responsible participants in building a modern, profitable, and successful Bulgarian agriculture.

On the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the Agricultural University in Plovdiv, congratulatory addresses were received from the President of the Republic of Bulgaria Rosen Plevneliev, from Prime Minister Boyko Borisov, from Milena Damyanova, Chairperson of the Parliamentary Committee on Education and Science. **/AG/**