

Institute of Agriculture in Kyustendil

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We present to you one of the oldest agricultural institutes in Bulgaria, which is a structural unit of the Agricultural Academy at the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Forestry. It is specialized as a research institution for solving theoretical and practical problems of agriculture, implementing Bulgarian and foreign achievements and providing assistance to agricultural producers.

History

The Institute of Agriculture in Kyustendil is the legal successor of the **Fruit-Growing Experimental Station in Kyustendil**, established by Order of the Ministry of Agriculture and State Property No. 2646/19.12.1929. It is located in Southwestern Bulgaria, in a region with favorable natural and climatic conditions for growing fruit species. It is the first center not only of practical, but also of scientific fruit-growing thought in our country. It began its activity under the management of Senior Research Fellow, First Degree, Todor Zahov (1929–1939). Two Decrees, signed by Tsar Boris III,

were issued for the allocation of 283 decares of land from the territory of the village of Nikolichevtsi near Kyustendil to the Experimental Station. At the end of 1944 the Experimental and Control Station was transformed into a Fruit-Growing Testing Institute. Three departments were established: breeding and variety study, agrotechnics, plant protection. Variety and agrotechnical trials were initiated on irrigation, clonal rootstocks, plant protection and others.

In 1965 the fruit-growing department of the Complex Experimental Station in the village of Negovan, Sofia region, was merged into the institute. The first pot experiments with fruit plants were established and studies were initiated on the root system of apple, pear and plum, as well as on determining the fertilizer requirements of fruit plants through leaf diagnosis. The first trials in Bulgaria were conducted to determine the effect of aerial spraying against scab, codling moth and mites on apple; studies were launched on the biology and control measures against powdery mildew on apple and leafrollers on cherry. New varieties were approved: pear – *Pautalia*, and cherry – *Pobeda*, *Kyustendilska Khrushtyalka* and *Cherna Konyavska*. In the period 1967–1970 more than 250 fruit varieties were introduced from the USA and Canada. The beginning was laid of virological research on cherry and sour cherry, as well as of the targeted use of induced mutagenesis to accelerate the breeding process. The institute became a center for the implementation of scientific and technological progress in fruit growing and assumed responsibility for the development of cherry, sour cherry and pear production throughout the country, and of apple production in Southwestern and Northwestern Bulgaria. After 1982, when the Agricultural Academy was established in Sofia, the Fruit-Growing Institute in Kyustendil was included in its structure as an independent scientific unit.

After the year 2000

The Fruit-Growing Institute in Kyustendil and the Experimental Station for Fruit Growing and Canning (ESFGC) in Kostinbrod were transformed into the Institute of Agriculture. In 2006 the Variety Testing Station in the village of Bagrentsi was joined to the institute and the arable land was increased by a further 120 decares. The cherry varieties *Danelia* and *Stefania* and the rootstocks for cherry and sour cherry – *IK-M8* and *IK-M9*, as well as the plum variety *Kyustendilska Krasavitsa*, were officially recognized. At the international exhibition “AGRA” 2013, the Institute of Agriculture in Kyustendil was awarded gold medals and certificates for innovation for the new apple variety *Besapara*, and in the section “Machinery, equipment and technologies for crop production” for the “Technology for efficient and sustainable production of apple fruit” and the “Technology for growing cherry orchards”. Six apple and four cherry varieties were recognized.

At the Sixth National Exhibition, *INVENTIONS, TRANSFER, INNOVATIONS – AND YOU – 2015*, the new self-fertile cherry variety *Dima* was awarded a gold medal and a diploma for innovation.

International cooperation

Over the past two decades, the Institute of Agriculture in Kyustendil has had very good relations in the field of research cooperation and training with the Institute of Agriculture and the “St. Cyril and Methodius” University in Skopje, Republic of North Macedonia, with the Institute of Horticulture in Skierniewice, Poland, with the Institute of Fruit Growing in Yantai and the Heilongjiang Academy of Agricultural Sciences, Harbin, People’s Republic of China.

Under the bilateral scientific and technical cooperation between Bulgaria and China, coordinated by the Ministry of Education and Science, the institute has 3 projects – one successfully completed and 2 ongoing, under which a number of hybrid forms have been selected and new varieties and hybrids have been introduced.

In the field of production practice, in 2012 a service agreement for scientific support was signed with the Chinese company Fujian Agricultural Science and Technology Development Co, Ltd. Royal, under which, with the permission of the Agricultural Academy – Sofia, we transferred for one year the licensing rights to our cherry varieties *Stefania* and *Danelia* and the raspberry variety *Lyulin* for the production of planting material from them.

We continue to develop!

You can read the full material about the Institute of Agriculture in Kyustendil in issue 3/2016 of the journal “Plant Protection”.