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Traditions and Challenges of Agricultural Education, Science and Business

THE THESSALONICA AGRICULTURAL AND INDUSTRIAL INSTITUTE

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Abstract

The Thessalonica Agricultural and Industrial Institute, best known as the American Farm School (AFS) is an independent, non-profit educational institute. It was founded by the American missionary Dr. John H. House in 1904. The institute is located in Thessaloniki, and provides formal and non-formal agricultural and environmental education to people from Greece and abroad at all levels. Production, innovative research and information dissemination comprise a strong component of its main activities regarding rural development.

Key words: Education, production, research, innovation

INTRODUCTION

In the past, basic agricultural knowledge and experience were passed on to farmers verbally, and in many cases, religion and soil cultivation were tied together. Occasionally, agriculture teachers had to serve as priests to local rural communities.

The first educational script of agriculture was written by Hesiodus in the 8th century BC with the title: "Works and Days" (Apostolides, 2007).

As centuries progressed, forward looking farmers created modern demonstration farms; agriculture become a topic of education and formal science; and the first teaching and research chairs of agriculture and agricultural economy were established in Oxford and Edinburgh at the end of the 18th century. However, the pioneer year in agricultural education and research is determined to be 1862, when the US Congress voted legislation to establish the United States Department of Agriculture and agricultural colleges that later became state universities known as land grant universities.

Dr. John Henry House was a visionary individual from Painesville, Ohio, who was inspired by the work of Hampton Institute in Virginia, Tuskegee Institute in Alabama and Penn School in South Carolina, and as a result, he created the Thessalonica Agricultural and Industrial Institute, in 1904. The reasons were purely humanistic and connected to poverty, to serious food shortages and to total ignorance of techniques applied to agricultural production in the region (Marder, 2004). The first students were twelve male orphans, and the founder's goal was to educate their mind (knowledge) hands (skills) and heart (formation of character). One hundred and six years later, the School still keeps the same pattern of

bridging education with production, effective blend of theory with practice, and proper formation of character (Apostolides, 2007).

MODERN TIMES

Today, AFS continuous to show significant progress in the areas of innovative education, production, research and know how transfer in the fields of applied agricultural technology. It endeavours to prepare its students for leadership roles in community life, and to do so in an environment that fosters individual initiative, a spirit of enterprise, an appreciation of excellence, a lasting attitude of inquiry, and the ability to work co-operatively for the sustainable development of the rural communities in Greece and abroad.

Core educational programs – a holistic approach

The institute offers opportunities of education to the community on three different levels: secondary, post-secondary and adult training. In addition international exchange programs are available during the summer to students who wish to explore opportunities of gaining internship and cultural experiences in EU countries and the U.S.

Secondary Education

Today, secondary education operates three different curricula: the General Lyceum with three years of studies in technology and science, the Vocational Lyceum with three years of studies in agronomy, food science and the environment and the Vocational School with two years of studies in agrotourism, farm machinery, landscaping, greenhouse, animal husbandry, viticulture and wine making, milk processing and cheese making, and arboriculture. The total number of students is 250.

The curriculum is divided into two separate parts. The morning sessions operate under the auspices of the Ministry of Education, Lifelong Learning and Religion, and the afternoon sessions that feature project management in diverse agricultural and technical subjects, operate under the auspices of the Ministry of Rural Development and Foods.

After their regular study hours, all students enroll and participate in afternoon extracurricular activities. For that reason, there are at least 12 clubs in operation throughout the year, and their activities range from athletics to pottery and from theater to astronomy.

Graduates from General and Vocational Lyceums are eligible to either sit for the national entrance examinations for public tertiary education, or pursue higher studies at private colleges and universities in Greece and abroad.

Post Secondary Education - Perrotis College

Perrotis College was founded in 1996 and gained recognition by the Greek state in 2010. It represents an international university degree program of agricultural science that is based upon innovation in teaching, research and communication, having English as the language of instruction. The program is validated by the University of Wales Institute, Cardiff and offers BSc (Hons) degrees in International Agribusiness and in Environmental Systems Management, with specializations in the areas of International Agribusiness Management, Marketing Management for the Food Industry, Agrotourism, Precision Agriculture, Urban Landscape & Xeriscape Technology and Livestock Management. The curriculum is supported by the Internship program, offering actual work experience to students in selected agricultural and scientific enterprises in Greece and abroad.

The graduates from Perrotis College enter the labor market, or pursue post graduate studies abroad.

Adult Education

The American Farm School offers continuing training opportunities to adults since 1936. However, only in 1996 did this become officially recognized by the Greek state to offer validated programs through its certified Center of Vocational Training in the sectors of agriculture, industry and transport, environment, tourism, finance and management, information technology and training of trainers. In addition, the Center of European Information, Europe Direct, functions under the auspices of the European Commission with the mission to identify, collect and make accessible current and reliable information on agriculture and European Union policies to all citizens of the seven prefectures of Greece, Region of Central Macedonia.

Research

The institute's research mission is to work responsibly on subjects of cutting edge technology in the areas of agriculture and food and to promote and demonstrate practices that are economically viable and socially responsible for the sustainable development of the industry and the rural communities.

Qualified employees of the institute, especially faculty from Perrotis College, take on initiatives for research on innovative subjects in collaboration with their counterparts from other institutes, private companies and organizations from Greece and abroad. Research is incorporated into the core educational programs via demonstration and internship, and students are able to observe the latest developments in the science of agriculture and food technology.

Support services

Education and research activities are supported by a diversified demonstration farm, which is characterized as the "living laboratory" and the Dimitri and Aliki Perrotis Library.

Demonstration Farm

The Demonstration Farm bridges education with production. Students of all programs undertake project and research activities with their advisors in the areas of agricultural production, animal husbandry, agribusiness, and natural resource management. Each year thousands of farmers, schoolchildren, university students and other visitors enjoy the opportunity to observe, participate and learn.

The farm is divided into Dairy, Poultry and Horticulture units. The purebred Holstein-Friesian dairy herd has been the industry leader in productivity and quality of milk continuously since 1935, when AFS first introduced milk pasteurization to Greece. The Poultry unit uses the latest scientific methods to produce and market Omega-3 and standard eggs, turkeys, broilers and day-old chicks. Those products have created a niche market and are sold at premium. The Horticulture unit includes greenhouses and nursery; a vineyard and winery; olive trees; and extensive experimental and other field crops both on the campus farm and at the satellite Zannas Farm, located to the west of Thessaloniki near the Axios River.

Dimitri and Aliki Perrotis Library

The Dimitri & Aliki Perrotis Library provides quality, contemporary information resources and services in support of the educational and research programs. The Library's primary role is to serve all students and staff, as well as the general public. In addition, Library provides an online repository where visitors can find all material of the institutional archives.

Discussion

The Thessalonica Agricultural and Industrial Institute founded by Dr. John H. House in 1904. Since its founding, the institute has evolved to become one of the prime educational entities in Greece and abroad offering studies in agriculture, food technology and rural development. Twice it has been awarded honors by the Academy of Athens (1932 & 2001) for the education it provides to rural youth and for its contribution to the rural development of Greece (Marder, 2004).

Its evolution rests upon values that arise from cultivating excellence for leadership and personal metamorphosis (Lanşdale, 2000). This concept is based on bridging education with production, and in educating the mind, the hands and heart. The triptych: I hear - I forget, I see – I remember, I do – I understand (Lansdale, 2000) is routinely practiced throughout our programs. Students are encouraged to exercise the latest technologies and enterprise management in laboratories and to work in internship programs in Greece and abroad in subjects related to their discipline of study. As a result, they gain practical knowledge and become more competitive.

Students participate in extracurricular activities which enable them to develop new skills and to cultivate new characters and talents that will eventually assist them in becoming active members of the society.

The 21st century has given agriculture new dimensions. Although farm activities and rural communities are on the decline, new opportunities have been created for education, production, technology transfer and research. The new era

has identified challenges that are global and not merely local. The viability of an educational system primarily depends upon tomorrow's career development and to the degree that graduates influence and contribute to their society's progress (Bain, K. 2004). Thus, schooling predetermines the conditions of the qualities in people's lives, and the texture, tolerance and future of society as a whole.

The ability of AFS to function and to stay viable depends on its vision, the type of knowledge and skills it cultivates, and the values with which its students are infused.

Flexibility of incorporating production and applied research opportunities into the curricula, and opportunities generated by strategically exploiting exchange programs, fulfill students' expectations for learning, and assist the sustainability of the institute's educational system.

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