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MEDIA RELEASE

01 JUNE 2011

University of Pretoria Receives Grant to Develop Agricultural Economics

A new grant to the University of Pretoria will allow UP to build long-term expertise in agricultural economics alongside partner universities in Africa. The \$4,475 million grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to UP's Department of Agricultural Economics, Extension and Rural Development will be for the period of June 2011 to 30 December 2016.

An important outcome of the grant is to allow the department at UP and its partner African Universities to offer more areas of specialization, to deepen research focuses, and to leverage the expertise for developing similar capacities in three other countries in the region.

This forms the basis for a much more long-term and sustainable objective of establishing and strengthening agricultural policy analysis units at various universities in Eastern and Southern Africa, with the core function of monitoring food staple markets in these regions.

The specific activities which will be supported by the grant are:

1. The establishment of three new academic positions in the agricultural economics program of UP. One position will have a focus on quantitative agricultural policy analysis, one on environmental economics and climate change and the third position on agricultural technology policy and analysis with a focus on the various economic issues related to the specific nature of agricultural research.
2. Creating opportunities for visiting faculty from the partner Universities in Africa for periods between one and two years to co-teach, co-supervise and collaborate on research projects.
3. Fund the secondment of UP staff and visiting faculty at UP to partner Universities to strengthen the curriculum and teaching offerings as well as do joint research.

4. Creating opportunities for visiting faculty (sabbatical leave) from partner Universities in the advanced economies – especially those with specific expertise in the focus areas mentioned earlier.
5. Establishing fellowships for post-doctoral fellows for 2 years.
6. Establishing a scholarship fund for PhD students (at least 5 new scholarships every third year)
7. Establishing a network of well-trained, well-equipped policy analysts in the Eastern and Southern African region that can in the future link into the future project where one of the key deliverables will be the development of a more detailed regional agricultural outlook.

Head of the UP's Department of Agricultural Economics, Extension and Rural Development, Prof Johann Kirsten said the grant will make it possible to increase the ability of the agricultural economics program at UP to make a stronger and more expanded impact on agricultural policy research capacity and output in the region. The focus is thus on long term capacity building and the strengthening of African institutions.

“Through the support of the Gates Foundation for the agricultural economics program at UP, the Department will play an effective role on the international stage and its capacity will be strengthened”, said Prof Kirsten.

Prof Kirsten also mentioned that through this grant, UP does not only want to serve its own interests to improve its academic enterprise, but will also in partnerships with the partner universities in Africa develop capacity and academic programs at those universities and eventually create new nodes of expertise in the field of agricultural policy research, teaching and practice.

END

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