

PAST WINNERS OF THE MANSHOLT PRIZE:

'Let the world know what you are working on'

The University Fund Wageningen will hand out the triennial Mansholt Business Award for Sustainable Entrepreneurship (M-BASE) on 19 September. Two previous laureates have some tips for entrepreneurs: 'If you've got a good idea that reflects your vision, go for it.'

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MANSHOLT PRIZE

With the triennial Mansholt Business Award for Sustainable Entrepreneurship, the University Fund Wageningen (UFW) seeks to stimulate and reward sustainable entrepreneurship. The UFW will hand out the prize of 25,000 euros once again this year on 19 September. Both enterprising alumni and entrepreneurs who collaborate with WUR qualify for the prize. The company in question should make an impact on society in one of Wageningen's domains. Enterprising alumni or other entrepreneurs can be nominated until 15 August.

Info: universiteitsfundwageningen.eu/mbaseaward or ufw@wur.nl

Jan Hadders, founder of agrotechnology company Dacom, was the first winner of the Mansholt Prize for Sustainable Entrepreneurship, in 2012. Having started out in crop farming, in 1987 Hadders began to develop an ICT system for helping farmers make better – more sustainable – farming decisions. For example, Dacom worked with Wageningen University & Research to develop a program that identified critical moments when potato farmers need to deal with the fungal disease *Phytophthora*. This approach is much more efficient and better for the environment than standard pest control, and is now in use worldwide.

DIGITALIZATION

In the past few years, the company has made the transition from offline to online decision-making systems. Another great leap forward was the addition of geographical information: every patch of land is unique and more and more parties are interested in

knowing what happens on it (in terms of crop growth or fertilization, for example). Hadders and his daughter and son-in-law established the company CROB-R in order to digitalize the registration of crops. 'We had hoped to develop a central platform which other companies would want to link up with, for the good of the sector. But everyone just went their own way.' In 2016, the companies merged to form Dacom Farm Intelligence. 'And we have gone on growing internationally, especially with our soil moisture sensors and our *Phytophthora* control. We are now working in 40 countries.' The relationship with Wageningen has cooled a bit, meanwhile. 'Wageningen has become a competitor because the researchers are now keen to market their knowledge themselves. And they have every right to do so. But for a company, it makes it difficult to do the work if you can't access certain scientific knowledge. And the other way around, like this Wageningen doesn't get to make



PHOTO COR RIJZEVELD



PHOTO GUY AKERMANNS

Jan Hadders of Dacom (above) received the M-BASE in 2012. Simon Groot of East-West Seed (below) was awarded it in 2015.

use of important knowledge from the field.' Hadders has three tips for entrepreneurs.

'One: you've got to have a vision. That gives you something to hold onto in the face of inevitable obstacles such as problems with funding or partners. Two: don't sit navel-gazing, but let the world know what you are working on. That's the only way to get any further. Three: if you feel you have a good idea which reflects your vision, go for it. It's action that matters in the end.'

Simon Groot of vegetable seed company East-West Seed was awarded the prize in 2015. 'We have now been working for over

35 years on innovation in tropical horticulture. Besides better quality seed, you need good quality people working with it.' The Mansholt Prize raised the company's profile and led to new high-fliers coming on the scene for the work overseas, says Groot. 'In recent years we have been able to expand in South East Asia in areas that were still untapped; the prize encouraged us to follow through with our strategy. It is still difficult in Africa, partly because local farmers lack knowledge and because there are not enough good new starters.' Meanwhile, East-West Seed has developed

FIND A PARTNER

Groot's main tip for doing business internationally: find a partner in every country who is prepared to develop the market with you. 'A suitable partner is one who shares the same vision and the same passion. I know they are scarce, but for long-term projects you need that passion. Personally I was lucky and in the Philippines I soon ran into a good partner. Thanks to that experience we managed it in Indonesia too. The area devoted to growing vegetables has doubled in the past 20 years and we are still market leaders. To achieve these kinds of developments you need people who want to stick with you for a long time.' ■

'It has taken 25 years to get the Asian market going'