

## **Speech by Dr. Aalt A. Dijkhuizen, Chairman Executive Board, Wageningen UR**

4 September 2007

Your Majesty, Mister Prime Minister, Excellencies, Queen's Commissioner, Mister Mayor, Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Executive Board of Wageningen UR, I would like to welcome you all here in Wageningen. A special welcome to you, Your Majesty, and to you, Mister Prime Minister. We are extremely pleased and honored to have you both with us. Today we have several things to celebrate: (1) the opening of the academic year of Wageningen University, (2) the opening of the Study Year of Van Hall Larenstein, our University of Professional Education, and (3) the opening of the Wageningen Campus in general and the Forum building, we are currently in, in particular. With the Campus we realize the physical integration of the three pillars of Wageningen UR – university, the more applied research institutes and professional education – exactly 10 years after the start of this unique collaboration. A tremendous project, at least for us, from over 160 million euros of investment, which took many years of preparation and extensive supervision during the building stage. We owe many thanks and a big compliment to the people of our Facilities & Services department, and all others involved, who did, and still do, a great job and who so far also managed to stay within budget, which is certainly not easy with this kind of projects.

In this building all our BSc-teaching of Wageningen University and the professional bachelor teaching of Van Hall Larenstein at the former Deventer location will take place and, when completely finished, about two-thirds of our staff will be located at the Campus. The others are located at various places in the country, and we started two offices abroad last year, one in China and one in South America, in Brazil. The concentration here in Wageningen, in what we call Food Valley, together with the regional spread, underlines our approach that we work and publish globally, and at the same time act locally, in close collaboration with our stakeholders. That is the way we try to combine the development of solid science on the one hand, and its applications on the other, leading to innovation in society and private industry.

Your Majesty, ladies and gentlemen, many people know us because of our agricultural focus. A focus which we are still proud of, but our domain has been extended and has become much closer to the end-user. Therefore, we currently describe our domain as 'healthy food and living environment'. Within this domain, we distinguish three interrelated core-fields: (1) food and food production, in which we pay attention to subjects such as a competitive agriculture, horticulture and fisheries, international food chains, nutrition and health, and the bio-based economy, (2) the living environment, with special attention to issues such as landscape and land-use planning, biodiversity, water and coastal management, and adaptation to climate change, and (3) health, lifestyle and livelihood, with a more social sciences approach, focused on people's attitudes towards issues such as human health, food quality, food safety, animal welfare, biotechnology and sustainability. And it includes a real basic issue for the quality of life: food security in relation to poverty in less-developed countries. Also an important focus point of our organization. It shows that our domain of 'healthy food and living environment' is a domain of all people, not only of farmers, food industry or environmental organizations. It also shows that it is a domain in the center of the public interest, or as young people say, a domain that is 'hot'.

Your Majesty, ladies and gentlemen, last year at the opening of the academic year I could tell you that Wageningen UR was in a good shape again, after a few difficult years in especially some of our applied research institutes. This year I am happy to tell you that our shape has even further improved. A few examples to illustrate. In the first place we are very pleased that for the fifth year in a row Wageningen University was able to attract more new students from the Dutch secondary schools than the year before. This time we are even by far the fastest growing university in the Netherlands, with a record-high increase of around 30%. Together with the enrolments from the Dutch polytechnics and from abroad we expect to welcome a total of 1250 new students. Also at Van Hall Larenstein total figures show an increase, especially at the Velp location. Interesting to mention here is the significant and increasing number of students coming from Germany.

Also on the research side Wageningen UR was successful and able to attract new extensive research initiatives, next to the many smaller projects which we also appreciate very much. Flowers & Food was earlier defined by the Innovation Platform, headed by our Prime Minister, as one of the key-innovation areas. In the first year of funding, Wageningen UR was highly involved in getting large programs approved and even three new technological top institutes were established: one in Food & Nutrition, next to a more applied program focused on small and medium sized enterprises, one in Green Genetics and one in Water Technology as a continuation of the successful Wetsus initiative at the Van Hall Larenstein location in Leeuwarden. This success continued last year, with (1) an interesting program together with the Veterinary School and the Animal Health Services on the development of

a vaccine against the contagious Avian Influenza disease, (2) an expert center on animal welfare thanks to the successful collaboration between Van Hall Larenstein and the applied research in this area within the Animal Sciences Group, and (3) more recently a very interesting 50-million euro program on Climate Change, together with the Free University, Utrecht University, TNO and KNMI. And we hope to hear soon, whether a nationwide program on genomics will also be continued and funded. Next to these successful national funding results, Wageningen UR made a very promising start in the new 7<sup>th</sup> Framework Program of the EU. In this first round we are already involved in 180 proposals in various fields, including food, agriculture and fisheries, biotechnology, nanotechnology, environment, energy, and socio-economics. Competition is strong and the average success rate low, but we are confident to continue the success of the 6<sup>th</sup> Framework Program, in which Wageningen UR participated in more than 250 programs, got a total of 90 million euros of research funding, and, very importantly, built up a tremendous network throughout all countries of the EU.

Next to these successful examples in research and teaching, we were able to further improve our internal organization and reduced the overhead costs, and so made more of the incoming money available for research and teaching. We will continue to do so. We are working hard on a large project to standardize and automate our project management, including the operational and financial management related to that. A project that when finished and implemented, will further increase the efficiency and the quality of our internal processes. Moreover, a new financial model that distributes the incoming government funding for the university among the chair groups has been developed and is ready for implementation. In that model we not only grant the amount of work, such as the hours of teaching and the number of student theses, but also pay for proven quality of chair groups in both research and teaching. We are in favor of rewarding quality and do hope that also the government will include quality criteria in distributing their money among universities, as currently being discussed. Finally we have strengthened our organizational structure and external position in infectious animal disease research, by merging the CIDC Institute and the Infectious Disease Unit into one new institute within the Animal Sciences Group. An extremely important area, as shown again recently with the Foot-and-Mouth disease outbreak in the UK.

The success of research and teaching, and the underlying operational support, is primarily a matter of people's effort and dedication. We are pleased and proud to have so many good and dedicated people in our organization and I would therefore like to thank them all for the tremendous amount of work that has been done again. It has become a tradition to mention some of them at this occasion, of whom we are *extra* proud. That is this time in the first place Prof. Marcel Dicke, head of the Laboratory of Entomology, who was granted the Spinoza Award, the highest scientific award in the Netherlands and the first for our university. We cannot stop saying how proud we are of that. In the second place our retired but still active professor, Dr. Gatzke Lettinga, who got the US-based Tyler Prize, also called the Nobel Prize for the Environment, for the development and worldwide application of his biological technology to treat waste and waste water. In the third place Prof. Willem de Vos, Chair of Microbiology, who got a prestigious appointment by the Finland Academy of Science as Distinguished Professor at the University of Helsinki. And finally four young scientists who received the prestigious and competitive Vidi grant of the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research, NWO, aimed at further developing their own research field. These are Dr. Duur Aanen from the Laboratory of Genetics, Dr. Martijn Bezemer from the Laboratory of Entomology, Dr. Jan Willem van Groenigen from the Soil Quality group and Dr. Bart Thomma from the Laboratory of Phytopathology. We wish them all the best for this next step in their promising scientific career.

And finally, Your Majesty, ladies and gentlemen, we bid today a formal farewell to someone who has had many careers - in science, in politics and in public service - Professor and Minister of State Jos van Kemenade. Prof. Van Kemenade served for almost 6 years as Chairman of our Supervisory Board, turned 70 earlier this year, and decided that that is even nowadays old enough to slow down activities. Dear Jos, we owe many thanks to your leadership during these years and as board and organization we have benefited a lot from your experience, your top-level network and your common sense. It was an honor and a great pleasure to work with you. Best wishes for the years to come for you and your wife Annie, especially. Best wishes also to Margreeth de Boer, who took over the chair of the Supervisory Board. We trust to continue the good collaboration.

Your Majesty, ladies and gentlemen, we cannot wait to start the new year and to work in the new facilities. Therefore I would like to wish our students and staff another successful year and declare the academic and the study year 2007-2008 open.