

Ladies and Gentlemen, distinguished guests,

Welcome to celebrate the start of the academic year 2012-2013. With us a joint starting point for the entire organisation, including Wageningen University, the Van Hall Larenstein University of Applied Sciences and the nine specialised and applied DLO research institutes. This will be the last time that Van Hall Larenstein is member of the Wageningen UR family. Within Van Hall Larenstein the synergies were not felt to be big enough to continue. We regret the development, but have decided to start the process of separation. A new Supervisory Board specifically for Van Hall Larenstein is currently being prepared, which in turn will appoint an Executive Board of their own.

Ladies and gentlemen, we continue to face economically challenging times, especially in Europe. We are therefore more than pleased that Wageningen UR is still doing well, both scientifically and financially. To maintain this situation, it is important to challenge ourselves constantly and adapt in time where necessary. We therefore have chosen 'future challenges' as the theme for the opening this year and are looking forward to the contribution of our speakers. They are Ellis Rubinstein, President & CEO of the New York Academy of Sciences, Loek Hermans, Chairman of Greenport Holland, and Martin Scholten, Managing Director of our Animal Sciences Group and of IMARES, our institute for marine resources and ecosystem studies.

It is only two years ago that we were awaiting a new government in the Netherlands at the time of the opening of the academic year. And now we are in the same situation again. The fifth government in a period of ten years! Not the most favourable situation for a consistent strategy and a long-term development. Two years ago we emphasised four issues to the key-people in and around the government formation process, which still seem to be more than valid: (1) the importance of the food & agrisector for the Dutch economy and employment, (2) the importance of a policy that connects agriculture and nature management; (3) the importance of short lines between government, business and knowledge institutes, the so-called 'golden triangle', and (4) the need for a high-level representation in Brussels and the wider international arena, justifying a dedicated ministry and a key-position in the Cabinet. Looking back on these two years, we can be satisfied with what was achieved in this respect. The position of our domain in the government policy was considerably strengthened, except for nature management, the relationship with the new ministry well established and the 'golden triangle' an example for the top-sector approach as a whole. Time was too short, however, to reap the full benefits of what was started and therefore we hope that a new government will continue along these lines.

The benefits of such an approach can be significant for our future economy and employment, because the demand for food is growing fast worldwide. We are currently facing the third peak in food prices in five years. A serious sign that the increase in food production is not strong enough to meet the increase in demand, making the system increasingly sensitive to incidentals, such as the recent drought in the US. High food prices especially affect those who have to spend an extensive part of their income on food and leaders around the world are worried for social unrest. Joint efforts, therefore, are needed more than ever to increase food supply. The further growth in world population will not only lead to a bigger demand for food but also for more space to live, to work and to recreate. As Mother Earth will not grow bigger, we do not have a choice but to increase productivity and efficiency in food production. And that is exactly what the Dutch sector is good at and known for. It is for that reason that we are being asked from all over the world to collaborate in the development and dissemination of knowledge and technology. From China to Chile, from Eastern Europe to Southeast Asia. The high productivity and efficiency are also the key-factors that make the Dutch food and agri system realise the lowest input usage and the lowest greenhouse gas emissions per kg of product. 'More with less', so to speak. That is the challenge and the way to go. Some strive nowadays for limiting the further development of the Dutch production system or even declining it in size. This would be completely opposite to what worldwide is needed and aimed for. Latest scientific research suggests that it puts either more pressure on nature and climate change or will increase food shortage and price instability. It is therefore highly questionable

whether such an approach is as sustainable and socially responsible as being suggested by the advocates. Reason the more to discuss and investigate this more extensively, before taking any decisions on future direction.

Ladies and gentlemen, we are very pleased that young people are increasingly interested to study and work in our domain. Latest figures show 10% more new Dutch students in our BSc-program than last year, with this time a huge increase in the social sciences, and 7% more students in the MSc, among which many from abroad. Together this leads to a record-high enrolment of around 2,150 new students, almost twice the record-low number at the beginning of this century. Van Hall Larenstein expects an increase of 2% compared to last year. Students remain valuing Wageningen University as the best university of The Netherlands, already having done so for many years in a row. The quality was also formally approved by the official Accreditation Organisation (NVAO), which awarded Wageningen University the institutional accreditation and the special internationalisation quality mark. The first one in the Netherlands. A big compliment for everyone involved.

Another visible evidence of the growth and health of our organisation is the rapid development of Wageningen Campus. Today we had the official opening of Impulse, our discussion and meeting centre, the facilities of which are also available for others outside our organisation. Moreover, the new Zodiac building was opened today, home of our Department of Animal Sciences. The construction of Orion, our second teaching building, is well underway and ready for use next September. And lastly we will soon start the construction of Helix, the staff building for our Food Department. Together with the NIOO and Stoas buildings and the rapid development of the R&D facilities of FrieslandCampina on our Campus, it shows how the 'golden triangle' physically comes to life here in Food Valley. That is also noticed abroad and just before summer we got a request from Fujian Province in China for space on the Campus for their leading food companies.

We are also pleased and proud that again many VIPs were interested to visit us and work with us. These were in the first place Her Royal Highness Princess Máxima who opened the European office of the Sustainability Consortium, the office of which we are running, and his Royal Highness the Prince of Orange, who was with us to celebrate the World Water Day, together with State Secretary Ben Knapen. Princess Máxima also received the first copy of the insect cookery book by Prof. Marcel Dicke. Moreover, we were delighted to have our Prime Minister Mark Rutte over for a work visit and we had State Secretary Henk Bleker over for a well-appreciated guest lecture for our students. And lastly we had fruitful visits of two mayors. In the first place Mr Guo Jinlong, Mayor of Beijing, who visited our applied horticulture centre and with whom we signed an agreement on a big project to increase and improve food production in the Beijing area. And related to that Mr Eberhard van der Laan, Mayor of Amsterdam, sister city of Beijing, with whom we agreed to act together internationally for the benefit of the two of us and collaborate nationally to help make Amsterdam and the Amsterdam region stronger, smarter and greener.

Ladies and gentlemen, a good shape of our organisation can only be achieved by great efforts and involvement of our staff and students. Therefore, I would like to thank them all for the tremendous amount of work that has been done again, ranging from publications in Nature and Science to actual innovations in the field. A total of more than 4,000 scientific publications, almost 4,000 professional papers and reports and around 6,000 references in the national press last year are far too many to discuss, and therefore I am happy to refer to our new website [www.WageningenUR.nl](http://www.WageningenUR.nl). The website has been designed in such a way that available knowledge and information are accessible much better. The site is due to be released later this month.

It has become a tradition to mention some of our people at this occasion, of whom we are *extra* proud. That are this time in the first place three people who were awarded extensive and competitive research grants: Prof. Ton Bisseling, Molecular Biology, who received the advanced European Research Grant of 2.5 m euros, Prof. Ewout Frankema, Rural and Environmental History, who received both the European Research starting grant of 1.5 m euros and the NWO Vidi grant of 0.8 m euros, and dr Bart Thomma, Plant Disease, who was

awarded the NWO Vici grant of 1.25 m euros. A tremendous achievement for all three in the highly competitive research arena. In the second place, Martin Verstegen, emeritus professor of Animal Nutrition, who was awarded the Massey University Medal, jointly with his wife Mariet, for almost 30 years of collaboration with Massey in New Zealand. Moreover, Prof. Verstegen will have his 100<sup>th</sup> PhD student graduated next week. A record-high number for any current or previous professor at Wageningen University. And then Prof. Herbert Prins, Resource Ecology, who received the only Fulbright Senior Scholarship that was awarded this year in the Netherlands. He will use the scholarship for a visiting professorship at the renowned Princeton University. In the fourth place, Prof. Gerrit Eggink and dr Ruud Weusthuis from our biobased group, who have realised a very extensive and strong partnership with the French oil company Total. The partnership focuses on identifying biobased ingredients for green energy and chemistry. An example for all of us. And last but not least Dr Peter Zuurbier, Director of our Latin-America Office, who has built up an extensive network and portfolio of activities, recently crowned with a 40-million-dollar centre of excellence in food in Chile, which we are heading. An excellent example of our international ambitions.

Ladies and gentlemen, the world is facing great challenges in the areas of food, water and energy. Wageningen UR is committed to help develop and implement solutions for these challenges. A tremendous task that we only can do together. We are eager to continue the collaboration with all of you.

With that in mind, I declare the academic year 2012-2013 open.

Dr. Aalt A. Dijkhuizen  
President & Chairman of Wageningen UR