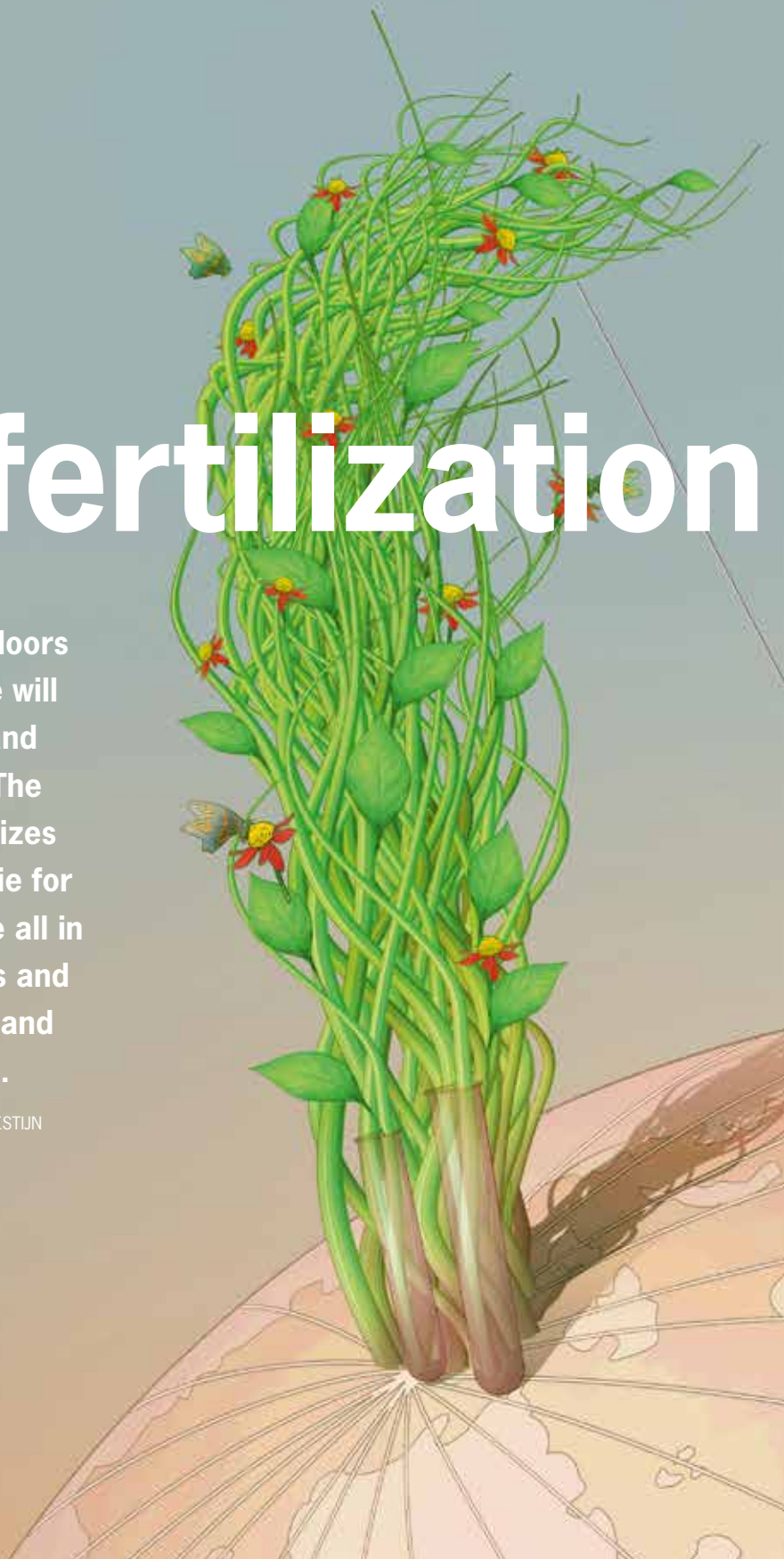


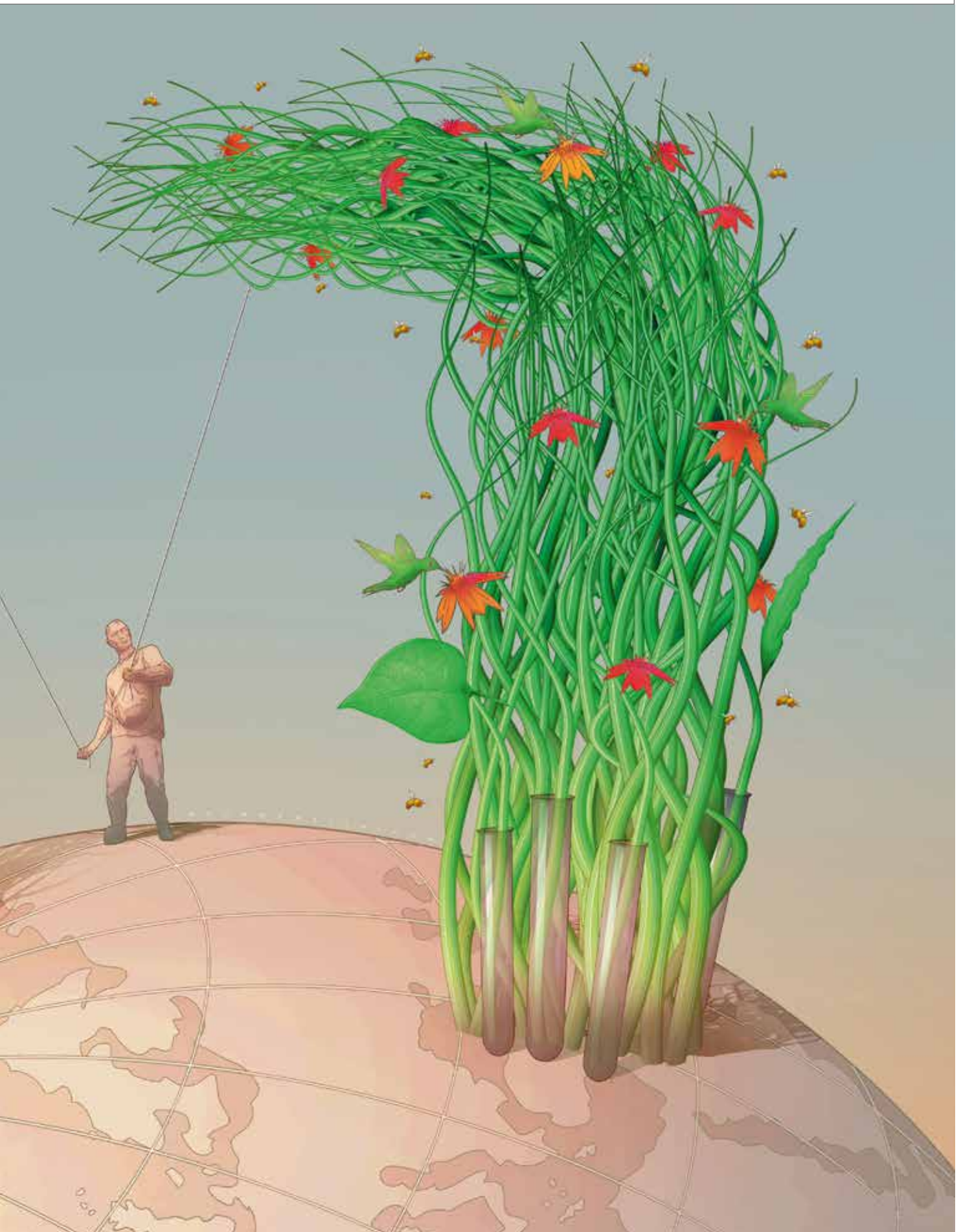
STRATEGIC PLAN 2015-2018

Cross-fertilization

Wageningen UR is throwing its doors open to the outside world: there will be more of a buzz on campus and more dialogue with the public. The new strategic plan also emphasizes where Wageningen's strengths lie for tackling global problems: above all in further integration of disciplines and its combination of fundamental and applied research and education.

TEXT YVONNE DE HILSTER ILLUSTRATION RHONALD BLOMMESTIJN







The Executive Board presented Wageningen UR's new strategic plan in July. The plan outlines Wageningen UR's ambitions and planned course for the period 2015-2018. 'In 2018, when we celebrate our centenary, we want to be even better and more relevant in our domain,' is how Executive Board president Louise Fresco describes the organization's goal. The strategic plan is much more than a piece of paper, stresses Fresco. 'Even more important is the process that has led to this end result. Talks have gone on at all echelons of the organization and with stakeholders, about key developments, existing opportunities and the direction we want to take.' In no way does she see drawing up a strategic plan as a tedious obligation.

LUCAS VOS,
general director at FloraHolland

'Research results are not actively enough presented to plant-breeders'



PHOTO NILS VAN HOUTS

'I thought the working dinner about the strategic plan was a great initiative. It was well run too, so you heard about the different perspectives of those present, from government or other institutions for instance. We don't often get together at this level in the sector to talk about important strategic issues that affect us all. I'd

be happy for Wageningen to organize more of these kinds of meetings; that is value creation too. A meeting about the TTIP trade treaty, for instance, to inform us as a sector and take a stand politically. What I wanted to tell Wageningen UR was to share their knowledge more actively and make suggestions for research. There is a lot of knowledge in Wageningen and the combination of fundamental and practice-oriented research is valuable, but research results are not presented to plant-breeders enough in active and user-friendly forms. At an information evening, perhaps organized jointly with us, researchers could also get topics for further research. That might help to fill the gap left by the Horticulture Product Board now it's been scrapped.'

'The strategic plan must be a living plan'

'Just the path towards it alone has strengthened internal collaboration, the One Wageningen we want to work towards.'

The planning started with extensive consultations in 2014. Discussions were held with groups of students, staff and consultative bodies about the vision, points for attention, business models and how to promote collaboration. The advisory boards of the various institutions in Wageningen UR, the AgriTop50 (the top 50 people in Dutch agriculture selected by sector magazine Boerderij) and the Wageningen Ambassadors were also all asked what they considered to be Wageningen's strengths. A draft plan was discussed over a working dinner. Fresco herself was involved almost from the start. 'It was a coincidence that preparations had just begun when I was appointed president, but it was lucky for me. Now it is my plan too, just as much as everyone else's here within Wageningen.' The same goes for the Executive Board. 'We want to go for this together,' says rector magnificus Arthur Mol. 'In the scientific field the strategic plan offers plenty of scope for exploring new avenues and reaching new depths.'

GOOD TIMING

The timing of the strategic plan is fortuitous. In September the United Nations replaced its millennium goals with sustainable development goals (SDGs), while the Scientific Council for Government Policy referred at the end of last year to the massive global challenge in the field of food supply. Agricultural production is coming up against ecological limits, multiresistant bacteria are emerging due to antibiotics use in livestock farming, animal diseases are being transmitted to humans and many people have unhealthy diets. Then there is the question of the robustness of the food system, and whether it can withstand shocks such as climate change. In the planning phase an analysis was made of the most important issues facing our world: the need for suffi-

cient, safe food and clean, fresh water for the growing world population; the sustainable use of the earth by developing a circular economy; the development and conservation of nature and biodiversity; and climate change. ‘We can see that we’re in a good starting position,’ says Fresco. ‘The SDGs are more sharply focused on our fields of expertise than the millennium goals were.’ So Wageningen UR’s mission remains unchanged. ‘To explore the potential of nature to improve the quality of life’ is still a hugely relevant aim, says Fresco.

COLLABORATION

So that this role can be tackled even more vigorously, there is going to be a greater emphasis on integrating different disciplines. This fits well with developments in science such as the use of Big Data – enormous databases, for example of DNA data in biological research. This emphasis on cross-fertilization is in line with the EU programme Horizon 2020, which says that the major social challenges demand a problem-focused approach bringing together resources and knowledge from different fields, technologies and disciplines, including the social sciences and humanities. For example, to provide people with an adequate supply of safe, healthy food and water you need not just adequate production levels but also a good distribution system, sustainable resource use, and insight into the roles of social context and people’s behaviour in production and consumption. Fresco: ‘That is why we place the emphasis in the strategic plan on strengthening collaboration between the various branches of Wageningen UR. The extent of our interdisciplinarity as an organization is quite unique. Building on that, our aim is to bring the applied and fundamental research closer together, including by involving the staff of our research institutes in the education side.’

The emphasis on improving collaboration has already borne fruit in relation to the subject of water, which is more prominently on the agenda in the new strategic plan. Fresco: ‘On the basis of our One Wageningen philosophy we are looking at getting the institutes and university to join forces in the field of water. We are also holding discussions about research in this area with water research organization Deltares, science organization TNO and the ministry of Infrastructure and Environment.’ Fresco sees more scope for collaboration in the field of biobased research as well.

INGRID JANSEN,

chair of the Dutch union of pig farmers

‘Wageningen’s raison d’être mainly comes from the farmers’



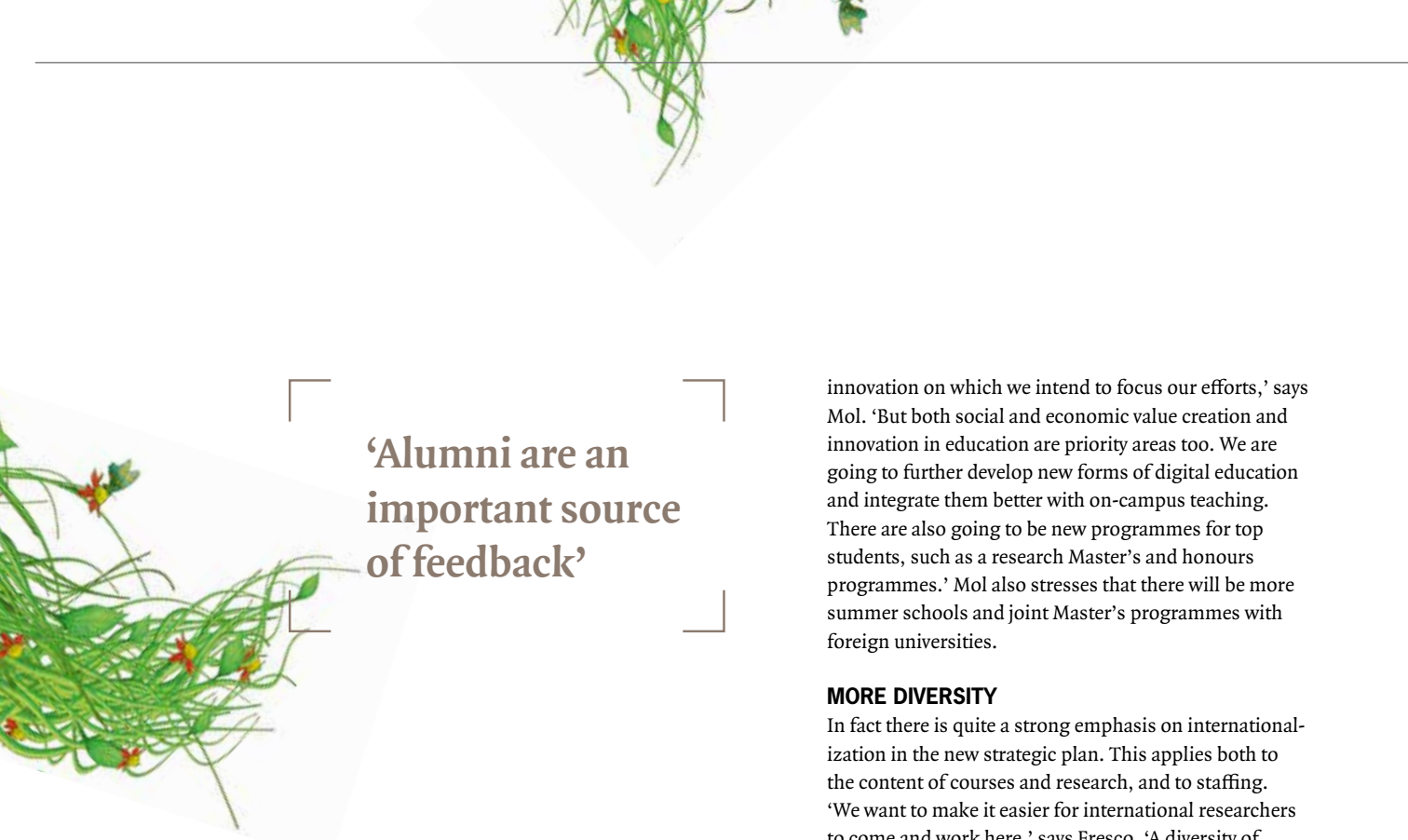
PHOTO NICK VAN ORMONDT

‘I responded to the invitation to the working dinner about the strategic plan because Wageningen UR is an important partner for us and it is important to maintain the connection between the business world and the scientific one. Now that the product boards are gone, you realize how much they did. With the

disappearance of collective funding not only must the sector reorganize itself, but Wageningen must play its new role too. But it is not clear to me yet how Wageningen UR will maintain adequate links with the primary sector in the coming years. The vision in the strategic plan is too abstract for that. Whereas Wageningen’s raison d’être mainly comes from the farmers. Without a strong primary sector the rest of the supply chain couldn’t exist either. I also thought it was a pity that we were invited for a discussion only after the broad lines of the plan had been laid down. If you want to broaden your support base, it might have been more useful to organize a meeting with the primary sector at an earlier stage.’

When it comes to research, Wageningen UR plans to invest in five research areas over the next four years. These themes represent key global challenges in areas in which the Wageningen approach, integrating natural science and social science research, comes into its own. The themes are A Global One Health (health for humans, animals and plants); Resource Use Efficiency (more sustainable and efficient systems of production and consumption); Resilience (of ecosystems and of economic and social systems); Metropolitan Solutions (to enhance the quality of life in big cities); and Synthetic Biology. These investment themes are explored in this issue of Wageningen World.

‘The five investment themes indicate the areas of >



‘Alumni are an important source of feedback’

SIMONE VAN VUGT

who led the consultation process in the Social Sciences Group at Wageningen UR, and has contributed to the contents from the Centre for Development Innovation

‘Our planning process was as participatory as possible’



PHOTO PAUL RIJSTER

‘I oversee a lot of change processes. It is important that we as staff and students work together on the strategic plan and the implementation plan that goes with it, because we are the ones who have to carry it and do the work.

The planning process was as participatory as possible.

Sitting at a table together

to make a diagram of Wageningen UR’s core themes created openings for getting the various units to look beyond their boundaries. The brainstorming between professors, junior and senior researchers and students generated understanding of each other’s points of view, and brought differences to the surface as well. It is good that partners of Wageningen UR were consulted too. Something that could have made it even better was to have invited parties that have nothing to do with Wageningen UR, such as filmmakers, artists, architects and people from the healthcare sector – for their fresh take on things.’

innovation on which we intend to focus our efforts,’ says Mol. ‘But both social and economic value creation and innovation in education are priority areas too. We are going to further develop new forms of digital education and integrate them better with on-campus teaching. There are also going to be new programmes for top students, such as a research Master’s and honours programmes.’ Mol also stresses that there will be more summer schools and joint Master’s programmes with foreign universities.

MORE DIVERSITY

In fact there is quite a strong emphasis on internationalization in the new strategic plan. This applies both to the content of courses and research, and to staffing. ‘We want to make it easier for international researchers to come and work here,’ says Fresco. ‘A diversity of backgrounds is important, because it generates more ideas and approaches and contributes to creativity. We ourselves would like to work in the countries where there are the best opportunities, countries where a collaborative triad of government, business and knowledge institutions is present. We are working on an inventory of such countries.’ In any case, Wageningen UR aims to strengthen collaboration with strong players in its field in Europe and North America. These include the renowned French agricultural institute INRA, and Cornell University and UC Davis in the United States. Wageningen UR is also eager to strengthen links with alumni. ‘Alumni are an important source of feedback and we notice that they are keen to stay in touch too,’ says Fresco. ‘We want to help set up more alumni chapters overseas. That can be of interest to companies that work overseas in our domain and are looking for staff. I went to China for this earlier this year, for the founding of a chapter. We are also thinking of organizing a Wageningen Day in several countries: a day for both scientific exchange and a festive get-together. We want to celebrate our Founders Day abroad, too, and not just in Wageningen. And then there is the centenary of Wageningen University in 2018. That still seems far away but one thing that is already clear is that we really want to involve alumni.’

Wageningen UR also wants more dialogue with the general public in the coming years, in the same spirit as the consultations with a broad group of stakeholders on the development of the strategic plan. ‘Nowadays it is important that scientists don’t just emerge from

their ivory towers at the end of their research, but work on their contact with the public from the start and throughout their research, sharing the latest scientific insights with the general public is value creation too,' says Fresco. This contact will be called The Wageningen Dialogues. It will mean that researchers don't just publish reports, but that they do other things as well: from making an app to organizing a Food Film Festival to involve people in Wageningen issues. Wageningen UR can also function as a platform, says Fresco. 'You don't always have to have researched everything yourself to be able to say something about a subject or to organize an event related to it. Take the developments around modern genetics, animal welfare and the increasing scale of dairy farms. We are well placed to compare all the scientific data and insights on those topics.' Another

resolution has been made in this respect: to make the campus an even more lively place, with cultural events and debates.'

Since the presentation of the strategic plan in June, work has started throughout the organization on how to go about its implementation. Inspiration dinners are being held on the implementation of the five strategic research themes: how is the research going to be approached, and who is going to be involved in doing it? People have been assigned to take the lead on achieving the objectives for this year. New spearheads will be formulated for 2016. This ensures that the strategic plan is updated every year. That is important too, says Fresco. 'The strategic plan must be a living plan.' ■

www.wageningenur.nl/strategic-plan

SYLVO THIJSEN,

director of nature management service Staatsbosbeheer and chair of the advisory board of the Environmental Sciences Group Wageningen UR

'The basis for innovation is found at the interfaces between disciplines'



PHOTO ERNST DIRKSEN

'It was good that Wageningen UR held consultations within and beyond Wageningen circles. That way you can validate your own line, as an institution. What I drew attention to at the start of the planning process, as a member of the advisory council of Alterra/ the Environmental Sciences Group, was the importance of focus and prioritizing

in relation to potential sources of tension such as rising student numbers, internationalization and more self-supporting research in DLO. In the next few years Wageningen UR needs to set its sights on world-class education and research in the life sciences, and making the most of the interfaces between the various disciplines. Because it is often at these interfaces that you find the basis for innovation and for practical application.'



THEME ISSUE

The Strategic Plan 2015-2018 outlines the course Wageningen UR plans to take in the next four years: its ambitions in the fields of education and research. This theme issue of Wageningen World provides a window into these ambitions in several articles. Coverage includes online education, the development of the campus and relations with alumni, as well as the five research themes targeted for extra investment: A Global One Health, Resource Use Efficiency, Resilience, Metropolitan Solutions, and Synthetic Biology.