

FABI LAUNCHES PARTNERSHIP WITH CBS



FABI has entered into a research partnership agreement with the Centraalbureau voor Schimmelcultures (CBS)-Fungal Biodiversity Centre located in Utrecht in the Netherlands. This partnership will strengthen FABI's agricultural research capacity and will see the establishment of a global *Fusarium* research centre at the University of Pretoria. This is the first step in eventually extending the work throughout Africa by pooling the two institutions' expertise and leveraging FABI's existing framework and manpower. FABI director, Prof Mike Wingfield and CBS director, Prof Pedro Crous, have been working on realising this partnership for some time. The collaboration will use the CBS collection to strengthen the impact of the research being conducted at FABI. An important part of the partnership is the exchange of expertise and development and nurturing of the scientific talent at FABI.

During the first four year period of this landmark association, the University of Pretoria will fund two post-doctoral students and a research fellow who will move between the CBS and FABI to promote research goals of common interest to the institutions. Numerous other student and staff initiatives will occur and the team will link their already substantial critical mass to leverage new funding streams from industry and other sources. Prof Crous has a long association with Prof Wingfield as he was his fourth PhD student whilst still at the University of the Orange Free State. Prof Crous then completed his DSc at FABI at the University of Pretoria. He has been at the CBS for the past 12 years. His research interests lie in food security and plant health. Rapid population growth in Africa makes food security of primary importance for the future. Species in the fungal genus *Fusarium* are of crucial importance in several fields. They include some of the most important plant pathogens on earth and they play a crucial role in food spoilage. They also impact significantly on human and animal health through the production of Mycotoxins. Species of this genus are also used in the production of dietary supplements in the commercial food industry.

CBS is an institute of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW). Its Fungal Biodiversity Centre's research programmes focus principally on the taxonomy and evolution of fungi as well as on functional aspects of fungal biology and ecology, increasingly making use of molecular and genomics approaches. CBS maintains a world-renowned

collection of more than 100 000 living filamentous fungi, yeasts and bacteria. It's also the largest and oldest such collection in the world, representing a large percentage of the species in the fungal kingdom that have been cultured to date. This diversity of species is unchallenged as a reference centre for mycological research. The task to preserve the organisms while maintaining their original characters is a challenge to technicians and scientists alike. The value of a collection depends not only on the quality of the strains, but equally on the amount and accuracy of the data attached to them. Although there are considerable differences among the various taxonomic groups, efforts are continually taken to increase the amount of associated genetic information. The available databases allow random information retrieval and give not only access to strain data, but also to literature while links to online information present elsewhere are provided. CBS is a centre of expertise, advising on mycological problems of a scientific, health-related or industrial nature. It offers various services including identifications, patent deposits and courses. The institute also publishes books and the journals: *Studies in Mycology*, *CBS Biodiversity Series* and *Persoonia*.