

ACHIEVEMENTS AND MILESTONES

CELEBRATING 18 YEARS OF TPCP, 10 YEARS OF FABI AND 4 YEARS OF THE CTHB

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The combined annual meeting of the Tree Protection Cooperative Programme (TPCP) and the Centre of Excellence in Tree Health Biotechnology (CTHB) is always a highlight on the calendar of these programmes and the forestry industry members, government and other research organisations with which they interact. What made this year's event extra special, was that it coincided with the Forestry and Agricultural Biotechnology Institute's (FABI) 10th and the University of Pretoria's (UP) 100th year celebrations.

The meeting focussing on TPCP and CTHB research was slightly shorter this year, a single day, but still packed with exciting and interesting information. There was a significant entomological component, with talks about progress in understanding and controlling *Thaumastocoris*, feedback on the unequalled effort to produce nematode for the *Sirex* biocontrol program, and an introduction to the newly arrived Eucalyptus gall wasp (*Leptocybe invasa*). In general the Entomology component of the TPCP is growing with leaps and bounds, with a new Quarantine Biological Control Centre just completed and an exciting development of a chemical ecology project. Fungal and bacterial pathogens, however, remain an important focus of the TPCP and a number of talks covered the genome sequencing of the *Eucalyptus* bacterial blight pathogen *Pantoea*, genetic mapping of *Fusarium*, as well as an overview of the various *Fusarium* and *Botryosphaeria* projects running in the group.

The meeting was opened by Mr. Chris Pienaar, Chief Executive of Hans Merensky Holdings who presented his view of the future of the Forestry Industry. The meeting was fortunate to have three senior international scientists attend, and they presented thought provoking lectures. Dr. Andrew Liebhold (USA), leader of the Forest Entomology focus in the Tree Health division of IUFRO, emphasised the value of co-ordinated population monitoring and modelling in controlling invasive insects. Dr. Andre Drenth (Australia), leader of the Tree Health Programme at the University of Queensland, talked about the bridge between the lab and field and the importance of offering practical solutions based on solid scientific evidence. Prof. Fred Asebiego, professor of Forest Pathology at the University of Helsinki, gave an insightful view into the central role of genomics research in addressing forest health issues globally.

The second day of the meeting was shared with an expanded group of delegates from other Universities, various government and industry representatives, all coming to celebrate 10 years of research excellence and leadership in FABI. FABI houses one of the seven NRF/ DST Centres of Excellence in the country, namely the Centre of Excellence in Tree Health Biotechnology (CTHB). For that

reason leaders of all seven centres presented a summary of their work, successes and challenges. This was the first time that the CoE's had ever been highlighted in a single event. This was an exciting tour de force of ideas from these leading South African scientists, who convincingly showed the incredible success of breaking down traditional boundaries amongst research organisations, collaborating across institutions and disciplines, to build a stronger research environment in South Africa together, not in isolation. As such these centres are making significant contributions towards meeting the training and research goals of higher education institutions in South Africa, which is central to the future competitiveness and growth in the country. The audience was informed that NRF and DST will build on the success of the Centres as one of the means of meeting these needs in higher education. Dr Andre Drenth, argued powerfully that there is a huge, and pressing, need for such success globally in terms of food and fibre security. FABI is clearly well set to continue its mission to meet these local and international challenges.

A special part of the meeting included the presentation of the UP Chancellors medals. These medals are the highest honour given by the University to people who have made significant contributions to the growth and goals of the University. Usually these medals are typically only awarded at graduation ceremonies, but an Institutional decision was made to present two awards as part of the FABI anniversary celebration, due to the close connection of the recipients with FABI. In fact, Mr. Mike Edwards (FSA) and Mr. Rodney Hearn (Banana Growers Association) are widely acknowledged as two of the key non-University associated people who contributed most significantly to the establishment and growth of FABI in its early years. These two deserving awardees of the coveted UP medals are exemplars of how humble, but determined and passionate individuals outside Universities, can make far reaching contributions to the growth of research and educational excellence at such institutions.