Welcome to the Stellenbosch University Food Security Initiative (FSI) e-news. Since our last newsletter in June 2012 we have begun some exciting new research initiatives and been fortunate enough to procure substantial funding from various sources towards our project supporting smallholder farmers into commercial agriculture. We’re also eagerly awaiting the publication of a Food Security special edition journal to be published in April by Springer. Read on for more information about the journal contributions of various FSI researchers.

There is a growing public interest around food security and the important implications for all of us on a local and global scale. In partnership with the Stellenbosch University Sustainability Institute (SI) and other SU departments, there are many young minds eager to take on these new challenges. The FSI currently has 82 Masters students and 24 PhD students registered with 51 Masters and 5 PhD students who have graduated.

The FSI is also excited to be hosting a lunch discussion on March 18, 2013 with various partners at the Sustainability Institute on “Creating a just food system through active citizenship” with Duncan Green (Oxfam Great Britain), Colette Solomon (Women on Farms Project) and Johan Van Rooyen (Stellenbosch University) and perspectives from Mark Swilling (Sustainability Institute). Please join us for what is sure to be a stimulating discussion.

Further information regarding this event can be viewed at www.sun.ac.za/foodsecurity
The National Development Plan (NDP) has taken centre-stage after being endorsed by the African National Congress, by the President in the 2013 State of the Nation address and by the Finance Minister in the budget vote. It is now the development framework upon which all policies and programmes of government must be pegged. The plan has a 20-year horizon, by which time, if its targets are met, South Africa will be a different country. The size of the economy will have tripled, unemployment will have dropped from 25 per cent to 6 per cent, and the number of households living in poverty will have fallen to zero. Active citizenship will be the dynamo that drives societal change.

With regards to food security, emphasis has been placed on securing the availability of food through agricultural production and trade. Recommendations focus on revitalising agriculture particularly through smallholder production that will complement existing large-scale producers. Also proposed is maintenance of a positive trade balance complemented by separate, supporting strategies for household food security. In order to improve efficiencies across the food system, a number of issues will be scrutinised. These include better access to price information for farmers, effective communication between transport companies and wholesalers, educating packers and retailers on safe food handling, and cost-effective packaging to lessen losses after harvesting.
Ensuring access to food will be achieved through narrowing the price differentials between urban and rural and through the creation of wider employment opportunities including expanded public works scheme. A raft of ideas has been put forward to support nutrition security. These include effective nutrition education for health workers, mothers and other caregivers as a national priority and strengthened linkages between agriculture and nutrition, particularly regarding producing and processing nutrient-rich foods such as legumes and other vegetables. Policy measures to increase intake of fruits and vegetables and reduce intake of saturated fats, sugar and salt, as recommended in the South African Dietary guidelines, should accompany strategies to increase vegetable and fruit production.

This thinking has been influenced by a food systems approach, which emphasises building a comprehensive understanding of the value chains in the food system that affect availability, access and the utilisation of food in both rural and urban areas. Broken into discrete issues, these seem manageable.

Departments are beginning to align their strategic plans with the national plan and there is a process under way to divide the plan into five-year time frames. Here the national planning commission must play a role in convening stakeholders and re-examining the options available to securing food. However, finding solutions will involve difficult trade-offs in decision-making and resource allocation. Implementation challenges will be overshadowed in particular by the need to align diverse institutions needed to achieve food security.
There is widespread recognition of the importance of developing a viable and thriving smallholder farming sector in South Africa to support the objectives of job creation and national food security. Last year, the SAFL (Southern Africa Food Lab), housed at SU, began a collaborative research project with the Institute for Land and Agrarian Studies (PLAAS) at UWC focusing on this issue. Key problems that the project seeks to address are:

- Tenure insecurity and lack of functional land rental arrangements;
- Lack of alignment amongst producer support programmes;
- Lack of accessible markets and high transactions costs;
- Lack of marketing skills among producers;
- Lack of access to finance.

The project has continued to gain momentum and attract interest from additional funders.

We are grateful to acknowledge the contributions of the Southern Africa Trust, Oxfam and the Ford Foundation as we expand on current research and work towards finding solutions for improving South Africa’s smallholder farming sector. Activities that will be conducted during this initiative will include: Facilitated learning journeys, Public dialogues and case studies and value chain analyses.

For more information regarding the project please see the SAFL website at: [http://www.southernafricafoodlab.org/innovation-groups/small-scale/](http://www.southernafricafoodlab.org/innovation-groups/small-scale/)
Supporting Smallholders Into Commercial Agriculture
The TAE meeting was the 3rd meeting of the Tertiary Agriculture Education Partnership (TAE) for Africa, co-hosted by TEAM Africa. The core aim of the meeting was to focus on improving the quality of tertiary agricultural education in Africa. The event was made possible by a generous donation from the World Bank and co-funded by SU. The FSI organized the meeting in collaboration with SU’s Faculty of AgriSciences and Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, on behalf of TEAM Africa. The meeting came at a time of civil unrest, as farmworkers were protesting throughout the Western Cape. This issue was addressed by the Rector Russel Botman in his opening address to Team Africa participants. To read more of his speech please see the link below.

http://bit.ly/QgK1vV

In his keynote address, Prof Frans Swanepoel emphasised the importance of smallholder farmers in broad-based poverty reduction and economic growth. He pointed out that 40% of Africa’s GDP is generated by the agricultural sector, and 25% of its exports consist of agricultural produce. Today, there is a renewed interest from development agencies, but their support is mostly focused directly on the agricultural sector. The role played by higher education has been neglected. “We need long-term investment to build sound scientific and institutional foundations. There is a great need to build TAE capacity,” Prof Frans Swanepoel said.

To learn more about the Team Africa Meeting please see the link below.

TEAM Africa Meeting November 13 – 15, 2012

Prof Hamidou Boly, coordinator of TEAM Africa, Prof Milla Mclachlan, academic leader of the SU FSI and workshop coordinator, and Prof Frans Swanepoel, Deputy Director of the African Doctoral Academy.

Prof Johan van Rooyen, Director of SU’s Standard Bank Centre for Agribusiness Leadership and Mentorship Development, and Dr Kurt Richter of Virginia Tech in the US.
The Food Security Initiative had the opportunity to be part of a special section of the Journal of Food Security; The Science, Sociology and Economics of Food Production and Access to Food. The FSI undertook this process as a more formal way of disseminating research findings and to introduce the Hope Project to a broader audience as well its celebrating the successes. The articles included in the special edition highlight the diversity of the various projects under the FSI umbrella. Keep an eye out for the following articles in the April edition:

1. Food security in South Africa - first steps toward a transdisciplinary approach, *S. Drimie, and M. McLachlan*
3. The role of wild vegetable species in household food security in maize based subsistence cropping systems, *S. Mavengahama, M. McLachlan and W. de Clercq*
4. Mussel and Oyster culture in Saldanha Bay, South Africa: Potential for sustainable growth, development and employment creation, *Oliver, D., Heinecken, L. and Jackson. S.*
The Social Learning for Sustainable Food Systems (SLSFS) project is an innovation, research, and action-oriented strategic alliance between academia, business, civil society and government to enhance food security in Southern Africa. The SLSFS project started in January 2012, with the enrolment of four Ph D candidates, whose research is focused on different conceptual and practical aspects of social learning for sustainability in the food system.

2013 saw the exciting addition of three new Masters students whose research focus areas span both the qualitative and quantitative aspects of the food system. Topics include addressing the philosophical and ethical questions around multi-stakeholder change efforts, the consolidation of South Africa’s seed industry and the role food waste flows could play in contributing to food production in Enkanini informal settlement.

For more information on this exciting project please see our website [www.sun.ac.za/foodsecurity](http://www.sun.ac.za/foodsecurity)

Our next newsletter will be published in September 2013, if you know of anyone interested in receiving it please email: [harpera@sun.ac.za](mailto:harpera@sun.ac.za)