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PRESSEMITTEILUNG

Student group "FRESH" receives distinction from UN

Improving sustainability and ethical behaviour in agriculture / Award ceremony on 28th November 2011 in Berlin

Eat ins, conventions and educational programmes about ethics in the agricultural sciences: Students of FRESH have been raising awareness of the importance of sustainable nourishment over the last three years- not just in lectures, but also on campus and privately. For this no lesser organisation than the UN has distinguished the group for its work at the University of Hohenheim. On November 28th, the German UNESCO committee will present the members with an award as part of the UN Decade "Education for Sustainable Development".

They came together from 15 countries to study in Hohenheim. Their acronym "FRESH" stands for "Food Revitalization and Eco-Gastronomic Society of Hohenheim". As unwieldy as the name may sound, its actions are sleek, focused and effective: to spread the message about the importance of sustainability. To that end, they organise eat ins with delicious food comprising organic vegetables which, for optical reasons, would otherwise be thrown away. Films which deal with every aspect of eating are shown in their food film series. The garden which they cultivate is so productive that a bounty of offshoots are overtaking the campus via mobile gardens using shopping carts. Using a traditional oven, the group is planning to bake bread for the general public, as well as to start up its own joint research project together with the University's Department of Cereal Technology. Their actions have reached over 3,500 people to date. The group's crowning achievement, however, is its own range of educational programmes designed to close the gap which they discovered in the syllabus of the Faculty of Agricultural Sciences. Thanks to FRESH, as of 2010 the University of Hohenheim now offers "Ethics of Food and Nutrition Security", a demanding and sophisticated module worth 6 credit points. The module was designed to incorporate two specialists' conventions with group plenary sessions. The International Center for Ethics in Science in Tübingen is responsible for the theoretical part. The practical part is made up of various lectures by experts in the field. Renowned experts like Anita Idel, co-author of the world agriculture report, provided valuable input for the module's conceptualising and planning. **The goal: the inseparability of agriculture and ethics** "FRESH impressively shows how what's possible with regards to innovate education. The jury's decision recognises the project's impact because it illustrates in clear terms how to act long-term", according to Prof. Dr. Gerhard de Haan, the chairman of the UN Decade's national committee and jury in Germany. The group believes it is on the right track thanks to the praise it continually receives. The UN's award is, for FRESH member Dhudenti Manoharan "a seal of approval that we stick to certain standards". Steffen Schweizer hopes that "it will become easier to receive

funding now." Using the fresh tailwind provided by the distinction, the students want, above all, to extend their ethics module and establish a long-lasting programme. Best-case scenario would be a professorship for ethics in the Faculty of Agricultural Sciences, but even a new post for a scientific assistant would be an improvement. "Our goal is the possibility to write a Bachelor's or a Master's thesis on this topic", says Manuel Hilscher. Until now, the module has been nurtured by the volunteer efforts of the FRESH members. Nevertheless, a minimum of €5,000 in funding is needed each semester, which for the last two years was supplied by tuition fees. By no means should the module degenerate into a routine feature of the curriculum. "There is lots of vitality and drive within the group", says Schweizer. "After the first year we did some extensive analysis and then some restructuring. This kind of self-analysis has to continue.", according to Manoharan. Hilscher adds that their wish is to preserve "innovative methods and teaching techniques".

Roundtable discussion concerning the future of the ethics module FRESH has invited members of the University's executive body, administration, and the persons in charge of organising and teaching the module to a roundtable discussion, which is to take place before the end of this year. The move was prompted by the fact that, without further support, the ethics module will be discontinued after the end of the current winter semester. "We sincerely hope that the University will continue to support us, especially since the UN distinction is an emblem for the entire University", says Manoharan. In addition, "Hohenheim has great potential to significantly improve sustainability and reduce global food shortages. We want to highlight this defining feature of the University even more", Schweizer adds. The group also receives support from the President's office. "I was impressed by the way the module took off last year", says Prof. Dr. Michael Kruse, Vice-President for teaching matters. He was present at the feedback and reflection session and says that he is anxious to see what will happen with the programme this term. "Even if things go well, we should still do our very best to ensure that the programme becomes firmly established", Prof. Dr. Kruse maintains. "I will take the opportunity at the roundtable discussion to help realise a long-term solution." He is personally very pleased about the students' work and finds them more than deserving of the award. "The University is proud to have on its campus such an enthusiastic and successful student initiative", the Vice-President exclaims. Alfred Funk, the University's head of administration, has already promised to pay for a visit to Berlin by five delegates from the group. **Background: UN Decade "Education for Sustainable Development" (2005-2014)** Sustainable development can only happen when each individual contributes towards making society humane. The skills necessary for doing so are advocated by the UN Decade "Education for Sustainable Development" (2005-2014), or ESD. UN member states have vowed to incorporate this ideal into their educational systems and institutions. A special jury of experts decides which projects are worthy of distinction. To be a contender, a project must be relevant to a basic tenet of education for sustainable development and must transmit know-how and skills in the three core areas of business, society and the environment. Last but not least, the project must be innovative in nature, have a wide field of application and be open to collaboration with other projects.

Text: Klebs, Transl.: O'Mealy