



## **International Outreach: Auburn University's Role in Economic Development**

Richard L. Guthrie  
Associate Dean  
Auburn University

**A**uburn University, chartered in 1856, is a comprehensive land-grant university, serving the state, nation, and world from its campuses in Auburn and Montgomery, Alabama. The university serves its clientele through its programs of instruction, research, extension, and providing short- and long-term technical assistance in agriculture to developing countries. International outreach has taken on a distinctly collaborative character as it is transformed from service mainly to developing countries to mutually beneficial service activities. Linkages between AU and institutions and organizations in other countries have replaced contracts and cooperative agreements with the U.S. Agency for International Development and international donors. Information exchanges have replaced technical assistance and training. University faculty and students are gaining international experience because of its intrinsic value for living in a global society. The American economy, in particular its agricultural and natural-resource sectors, is being challenged as never before to develop and use new technologies, to expand industrial uses of food and fiber materials, and to operate in ways that are globally competitive and environmentally responsible. Similarly, U.S. quality of life is being challenged on many fronts, including health, student disenfranchisement, economic well-being, environmental quality, and family stability. The globalization of our economy requires that agriculture and the marketing of its products be given close attention, especially with respect to its relationship with the environment and the dynamics of social systems.

These challenges are also due in part to the globalization of agriculture. Our success in providing a high standard of living to our population depends on a critical mass of ingenious and creative scientists and professionals who are attuned to global agricultural and environmental issues, and who can use their education and knowledge to solve the problems of the future. U.S. universities recognize this basic tenet; they are committed to human-resource

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development through the strengthening of higher education, including global issues, in the food, agricultural, and natural-resource sciences. AU is fully committed to these challenges; current programs described in this essay illustrate such human-resource activities in several countries.

### Program Highlights

#### Germany-Hungary

Two projects highlight AU's new emphasis on international outreach. The first, an exchange of agricultural leaders, has its roots in an economic and cultural agreement between the state of Alabama and Brandenburg State in eastern Germany. The second began with the 1992 visit of the rector of Pannon University of Agricultural Sciences in Hungary to Auburn. Both projects have grown to become annual exchanges among university and private sector agribusiness and forestry leaders, faculty, and students.

In late 1993, an economic-exchange group from Brandenburg State in eastern Germany visited the AU campus. The delegation included an agricultural leader who proposed an exchange of farm leaders with leaders in Havelland County, his home area in Germany. As a result of reunification with western Germany, large private farms were being organized to replace state farms in operation in the former East Germany. Most farm owners and operators had little experience with modern technology and even less experience with business management. Udo Folgart, chairman of the Havelland Farmers Association and leader of the programs, asked that members of his association would have opportunities to visit farms in Alabama, similar in size and economy to those in Germany. In a partnership with the Alabama Farmers Federation, AU's College of Agriculture agreed on an exchange that would involve annual visits from about twenty farm leaders each from Alabama and Havelland County.

In the spring of 1995, a delegation of agricultural leaders from Alabama visited Germany in conjunction with a similar visit to Hungary. Particularly valuable to the Alabamians were first-hand observations of how German farmers compete economically despite limitations of production restrictions imposed by the European Union, which compounded German farmers' adjustment to new technologies, free-enterprise economies, and marketing requirements unknown in former times.

German farm leaders first visited southern Alabama in October 1995 to visit farms, agribusinesses, and forestry businesses. These exchanges have continued into 1998. In addition to sharing valuable information and experiences, the reciprocal program has led to visits of German tourists to Alabama and creation of internships for young German dairy farmers on Alabama farms.

The AU-Hungary project began about the same time as the launch of the Germany project; three delegations of Alabama leaders have visited Hungary in conjunction with the visit to Germany and two delegations of leaders from Hungary have visited Alabama.

Because the partner in Hungary is Pannon University of Agricultural Sciences, exchanges have been coordinated by faculty of the two universities. One delegation visiting Alabama consisted of PU administrators eager to learn about private agriculture in the United States. The other delegation consisted of university, government, and private-sector forestry professionals interested in learning about private-wood production and processing.

A major outreach activity associated with the Hungary partnership, student internships, began in about 1995, when Auburn University agreed to provide internships on Alabama farms for fifth-year students at Pannon University. Sponsored by AU, host families provide students with the opportunity to observe farming practices, experience social and cultural activities, and enhance English language skills. Approximately seventeen students have been placed on internships ranging from one to six months on a variety of farms throughout Alabama.

#### Haiti

AU has had a presence in Haiti since 1987, when it began to implement an agroforestry research project. By 1992, linkages had been established with several public and private institutions, including Quisqueya University, a new donor-funded institution of higher education. Auburn and Tuskegee universities entered into a joint memorandum of understanding with Quisqueya to exchange faculty with the intent to develop cooperative programs that would benefit the students of Quisqueya while providing faculty of Auburn and Tuskegee with opportunities for international experiences.

Although the project has had limited results, it has continued and grown to include the National University of Haiti and attracted the attention of other U.S. universities. Brief exchanges have occurred, such as a Haitian education administrators' 1997 tour of Auburn and Tuskegee universities sponsored by the U.S. Information Service. More recently, an Auburn faculty member provided internships for Quisqueya students working on an Auburn project in Haiti.

#### China

Two projects involving relationships with institutions in China have been mainstays in Auburn's international outreach. The first, a faculty exchange with the Hubei Academy of Agricultural Sciences, grew out of a cooperation agreement signed in 1986. Each year, one to three faculty from each institution travel to the other institution, sometimes for only two weeks and sometimes for as long as ten months. Faculty exchange ideas, collaborate on research projects, and observe agricultural production practices.

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The second project is a training program for Chinese aquaculturists. Beginning in 1995, the American Soybean Association provided funds to Auburn University for intensive training in aquaculture for twenty Chinese scientists. A short course was conducted in Auburn for the following two years, but in 1998, the short course was conducted in China. This project is the first to have major involvement of a private-sector partner.

### Other Outreach Activities

Faculty in the College of Agriculture conduct research and outreach programs in the ongoing effort to enhance agricultural productivity of the state and nation. These efforts provide invaluable knowledge which can be applied to the agricultural problems of the developing world. For example:

- Auburn University aquaculture researchers collaborate with counterparts in developing countries to increase production of freshwater fish as a source of protein and to increase small-farmer income. Active project sites are Honduras and Kenya.

- A sustainable agriculture and natural-resources project creates teams of researchers from Auburn and counterparts in other countries who are developing strategies for management of large watersheds. Goals are to develop sustainable land uses that are both profitable for farmers and environmentally sound. Projects are carried out in the Philippines, Ecuador, and Haiti.

- Researchers at AU are developing strategies for marketing and low-input production of peanuts. Collaboration with researchers in Haiti enables the scientists to test production in areas where management is not intensive.

- In Haiti, AU researchers develop, evaluate, and promote the transfer of soil-management and integrated nutrient-management strategies that increase agricultural productivity and enhance food security in developing countries.

- Animal and Poultry Science faculty have participated in projects involving Vietnam, Russia, the People's Republic of China, Mexico, Guatemala, and Haiti. Recently, animal and poultry scientists began an academic-interchange program in Vietnam with two universities and with the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Industry. The major focus of these activities is the improvement of poultry and animal-science research facilities and the implementation of an extension program in Vietnam. Animal Science faculty have conducted collaborative research on swine genetics and animal by-products with scientists in the People's Republic of China and have trained scientists from Mexico, Guatemala, and Haiti on swine production. Other initiatives in Vietnam, Eastern Europe, and the former Soviet Republics are also expected to result in future project activities.

• The International Center for Aquaculture and Aquatic Environments (ICAAE), with its research, teaching, and international-development assistance efforts, has had tremendous influence on fisheries and aquaculture programs throughout the world. More than one-third of the eight hundred students who have completed advanced degrees in fisheries from AU have been from developing countries (214 master's degrees and sixty doctoral degrees), and another 250 international students have received either a B.S. degree or non-degree training. These students are providing the leadership for the development of aquaculture in developing countries.

• The ICAAE faculty provide short-term and long-term technical assistance around the world. For almost two decades, ICAAE has been in the forefront of development efforts in the fisheries and aquaculture areas. Over the past twenty years, ICAAE provided more than 135 person-years of overseas service in more than ninety-five countries.

#### Auburn University's Role as an Institution of Higher Education

Higher education will propel our nation into the twenty-first century. World-class faculty, rigorous curricula, and international experiences are essential to optimal learning experiences for students mastering effective technological applications and concepts. Higher education also will help to keep agribusinesses competitive.

Our colleges must be windows to the world through collaborative partnerships that are mutually beneficial to us and to our partners at overseas institutions. These partnerships must permit us to bring information back to faculty, staff, students, and businesses which will permit them to benefit from a better understanding of global issues. As land-grant universities, we must provide people with research-based information to help them make the right decisions in the future. The right decisions must be made with a global perspective. ■

#### About the Author

Richard L. Guthrie (Ph.D., Cornell University) is associate dean and director of International Programs in Agriculture, and professor of Agronomy and Soils at Auburn University. He served as acting dean of the College of Agriculture and head of the Department of Agronomy and Soils. He worked for about twenty-five years with the U.S. Department of Agriculture before moving to Auburn University. He is a member of the Executive Committee of

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the Board on Agriculture of the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges and chairman of the International Agriculture Section.

Guthrie has managed agricultural research and extension in two countries and made short-term visits to more than ten countries to conduct training and technical-assistance programs. He has published refereed papers in the *Journal of the Soil Science Society of America* and several technical reports on international research and development.