

18.11.2024

Vision of the Direction of the Faculty of Tropical AgriSciences

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Introduction

This strategy outlines my vision and objectives should I have the opportunity to serve as Dean of the Faculty of Tropical AgriSciences (FTZ). It provides a concise assessment of the current state of the Faculty and identifies key areas for its future development. The plan emphasizes **advancing quality education, fostering international collaboration, enhancing research excellence, supporting staff, ensuring financial sustainability, and increasing the Faculty's visibility and reputation**. These efforts aim to position FTZ as a global leader in addressing agricultural and environmental challenges while fostering sustainable growth and community impact.

The strategy highlights specific activities within seven key priority areas to guide FTZ's development, drawing on my extensive experience in Faculty management and insights from discussions with academic and technical staff as well as students. It focuses on actionable steps to create **a professional, collaborative, and inclusive environment, rooted in effective communication and teamwork**. The plan identifies critical areas for immediate attention and provides a foundation for detailed discussions with the academic community to refine and implement following priority areas and its objectives:

Education & Quality

- Enhance the quality of education while increasing student enrollment

Science & Research

- Advance research excellence and increase its impact

International Relations

- Strengthen global collaborations and capacity building

Projects & Partnership

- Expand partnerships and improve project management

Human Resources Management

- Foster a supportive and inclusive work environment

Financial Resources

- Ensure financial stability and transparency

Promotion & Visibility

- Boost the Faculty's visibility and reputation

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1. Education & Quality

FTZ offers a diverse range of English-taught programmes in areas such as agri-food systems, tropical crop management, agroforestry, international development and agricultural economics, and wildlife and livestock production. Notable initiatives, including a Double Degree programme with the University of Hohenheim, the Glofor multiple-degree programme with European universities, and a new online study option, enhance its global appeal and educational standards. While the curriculum is strong, **integrating interdisciplinary approaches and expanding hands-on learning opportunities** are priorities to better prepare students for global challenges. **Increasing student enrollment while maintaining high teaching quality** is essential to strengthening FTZ's position as a competitive, forward-thinking institution.

Key activities for improvement:

Increasing Student Enrollment

- **Boost student numbers:** Through targeted promotion, including school visits, education fairs, and leveraging student ambassadors.
- For international students, focus outreach on countries where obtaining study permits is feasible.
- **Expand enrollment in online programme:** Incorporating promotion into international activities (e.g., integrating promotion as a mandatory component of foreign trips of employees).
- **Enhance inclusiveness:** Improve quality assurance, reduce dropouts (particularly during the transition from bachelor's to master's studies), and adopt data-driven strategies for decision-making processes (e.g., regular evaluations and providing opportunities for discussions with students and alumni).

Teaching Quality and Curriculum Enhancement

- **Ensure high teaching standards:** Incorporating modern methods and promptly addressing student feedback (e.g., student evaluations and complaints).
- **Implement a system for alumni evaluation and study programmes content:** Incorporate student feedback into improvements.
- **Enhance curricula:** Interdisciplinary courses, for example, addressing climate resilience, health impacts, and policy evaluation.

Short-term Trainings

- **Strengthen partnerships** with organizations to offer field-based learning, excursions, guest lectures, and internships, including opportunities at partner universities in the global South.
- **Organize summer schools** to provide students with practical experience abroad or in university facilities, leveraging programmes like Erasmus+ programme (e.g., Blended intensive programmes).

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2. Science & Research

FTZ conducts significant research in tropical agriculture, sustainable development, and food security. Overall, the publication and research activities at FTZ are at a very high level, even compared to other faculties at the Czech University of Life Sciences Prague (CZU), both in terms of quantity per academic staff member and quality. To further its impact, the Faculty should focus on increasing **research funding, fostering interdisciplinary projects and collaborations, and enhancing the dissemination of research findings** to maximize the impact of FTZ's research. A key role will be ensuring **funding for doctoral students** and preparing for changes in funding regulations as mandated by the government of the Czech Republic.

Key activities for improvement:

High Quality Research

- **Increased grant applications:** Encourage and support staff in applying for national and international grants, with a focus on EU research funds, development agencies, and private sector sponsors with the assistance of the Project Centre.
- **Interdisciplinary research clusters:** Establish research clusters (working groups) that unite staff from diverse departments to tackle complex challenges and work towards achieving an equitable distribution of publication outputs among all academic staff.
- **Slow science practice and emphasis on quality:** Promoting research that serves the public good through inclusive approaches, such as participatory research methodologies and the involvement of local experts, while prioritizing quality and impact over the quantity of outputs.
- **Knowledge sharing platforms:** Create channels for sharing and disseminating research findings with the broader public and for their practical application (e.g., (e.g., organizing seminars and workshops with representatives from the private sector, research institutions, producers).

Enhancing Academic Pathways for Early-Career Researchers

- **Expanding postdoctoral opportunities:** Increasing the number of postdoctoral positions to strengthen research capacity, foster early-career development, and support the Faculty's commitment to academic excellence, made possible through the acquisition of international projects and grants, ensuring a sustainable and impactful contribution to the scientific community.
- **PhD Funding and reform strategy:** Ensuring financial support for doctoral students to enable them to focus on their research and academic development, aligned with Czech government regulations and preparing a comprehensive strategy for the new PhD reform, which includes reducing the overall number of PhD students, balancing the student-to-supervisor ratio, and developing clear rules and guidelines for funding (e.g., a new PhD scholarship) at the Faculty.

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- **Supporting PhD student mobility:** Promoting and facilitating the mobility of PhD students, particularly by securing funding for their participation in scientific conferences to engage with international research communities, present their findings, and build valuable professional networks.

Strengthening Research Infrastructure

- **Participation of international opponents:** Securing funding for the participation of international opponents (external reviewers) in doctoral defences. Inviting foreign experts to serve as opponents ensures a high level of academic rigor and external validation, thereby promoting the international recognition and quality of the doctoral programmes.
- **Enhanced research facilities:** Investment in modern lab equipment, greenhouse facilities (with support from the university), and remote sensing technologies to support innovative research in tropical agriculture.

3. International Relations

International relations and collaboration are pivotal to FTZ's mission. The Faculty has established partnerships globally, supporting student and staff exchanges, events, and joint research. With expertise in implementing international projects, FTZ has engaged in Czech Development Cooperation initiatives, Erasmus+ programmes (e.g., capacity building, international credit mobility, Erasmus Mundus), and Horizon projects. Currently, 55% of students hail from 76 countries, reflecting FTZ's diverse international reach. However, there is potential to expand these networks, **increase international student enrollment, and enhance involvement in international research projects.**

Key activities for improvement:

Collaboration and Networking

- **Global partnerships:** Focus on strengthening collaborations with a select group of key countries in tropical regions, prioritizing partnerships with leading universities and research centers. Concentrating activities in these countries will enable more impactful joint research, student and staff exchanges, knowledge sharing, and coordinated implementation of research projects, fostering deeper and more sustainable engagement than a dispersed approach.
- **Fostering collaboration through interdisciplinary teams:** Establish mechanisms to connect individual teams during project implementation and promote the creation of interdisciplinary teams to maximize potential and "combine forces." This approach aims to prevent internal competition while fostering the integration and strengthening of research teams. The initiative will be facilitated and moderated by the Project Centre.

International Experience for Students

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- **Double and multiple degree programmes:** The introduction of new double degree options for current study programmes with international partners to attract diverse student populations and expand FTZ's global academic influence (e.g., the upcoming double degree with Prince of Songkla University in Thailand) and the expansion of the portfolio of multiple degree programmes implemented within the Erasmus Mundus projects, which provide scholarships for excellent students.
- **Scholarships for international students:** Seek funding and sponsorships to provide scholarships for students from low-income tropical regions, enhancing FTZ's inclusivity and diversity.
- **Support short-term mobility for students:** To gain experience and expand their knowledge (e.g., participation in student conferences such as ELLS, international competitions, events organized within projects, and involvement in event organization).

Multicultural Environment

- **Fostering a multicultural environment:** Leverage the unique diversity of students from various countries by promoting teamwork activities, encouraging the sharing of experiences and knowledge, and creating an inclusive atmosphere that celebrates multicultural collaboration. This includes developing multicultural guidelines and an ethical code of conduct at the Faculty to ensure a respectful and supportive environment.
- **Student support initiatives:** Enhance student advising services, career counselling, and mentorship programmes to provide individualized support that maximizes academic and career outcomes. A key role in this process is played by Student Ambassadors, whose involvement in welcome courses, daily support primarily for international students, and other events organized at FTZ (e.g., Learn & Discuss) fosters teamwork, engagement, and knowledge sharing.

4. Projects & Partnership

FTZ has extensive experience in implementing international projects and partnerships, including collaborations in Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe, and Latin America. A key strength lies in its collaboration not only with European universities but also with non-governmental organizations and local partners in the project implementation areas. This diverse network enhances the impact and relevance of the projects in the communities where they are carried out. On the other hand, **it is essential to properly structure the functioning of the Faculty's Project Center to effectively support the project initiatives and activities prepared by staff**, identify suitable funding calls, assist with project writing, and provide administration support once projects are accepted. This will ensure the successful implementation and management of international and local projects. To enhance FTZ's international projects and partnerships, the following activities should be prioritized.

Key activities for improvement:

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Enhancing Project Support

- **Strengthening the role of the Project Center:** Harmonizing the needs of staff for submitting international projects, including administrative and financial requirements, and establishing clear guidelines. This will ensure that project initiatives are supported efficiently, with streamlined processes for writing, applying, and managing projects, fostering smoother execution and compliance with internal and external regulations.
- **Private sector collaboration:** Strengthen partnerships with industry leaders for applied research in sustainable practices and technology transfer.

Advancing Lifelong Learning, Capacity Building, and Global Engagement

- **Introduction specialized courses (micro-certificates):** Within the framework of lifelong learning, these course will not only generate funding but also promote the Faculty, expand collaboration across various sectors (e.g., a course on evaluating international projects for professionals in international development). These courses will enhance the Faculty's visibility and create new avenues for interdisciplinary cooperation.
- **Capacity-building initiatives:** Expand partnerships with universities in emerging regions to support training programmes and collaborative research, for example in areas such as climate resilience and biodiversity.
- **Global visibility:** Organize regular conferences, workshops, and webinars to share research findings with a broader audience and foster international academic exchange.

5. Human resources management

FTZ has a dedicated and skilled team of academic and administrative staff specializing in various disciplines. To sustain excellence, it is vital to **invest in professional development, acknowledge achievements, and foster a supportive work environment**. However, based on a recent satisfaction survey at CZU and individual interviews with the staff, it is evident that some staff members feel dissatisfied with the support provided for career advancement, personal development, and overall Faculty encouragement. Addressing these concerns is crucial to enhancing workplace satisfaction and staff retention.

Key activities for improvement:

Enhancing Faculty Management and Strategic Alignment

- **Professional management:** Establish a clear organizational structure outlining roles and responsibilities at every level. Strengthen the role of department heads by ensuring they regularly report department outputs during the Dean's meetings. Share minutes from these meetings consistently, making them accessible to all Faculty staff to ensure transparent communication. For planned activities, clearly

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designate individuals responsible for each task, ensuring accountability and clarity in implementation.

- **Harmonizing vice-dean positions:** The introduction and distribution of responsibilities for vice-dean positions should align with the university's leadership approach and the roles of vice-rectors. This structure would ensure a more cohesive management model, with clear divisions of tasks and responsibilities that reflect the strategic objectives of both the Faculty and the university as a whole, promoting efficiency and collaboration across departments. Moreover, it would be beneficial to have representatives from all departments in vice-dean positions to ensure a more balanced distribution of responsibilities and greater awareness. This approach would facilitate better coordination across departments and support the strategic development of the Faculty.
- **Revising department focus and support of growth:** Evaluate the current focus of departments to ensure alignment with key priorities and areas of expertise. For example, establish a separate department dedicated to food processing, allowing sustainable technologies to remain distinct. While food processing is part of the *Department of Animal Science and Food Processing*, its current scope appears more focused on wildlife management. Separating these areas would provide clearer specialization, enhance research and teaching efficiency, and better reflect the Faculty's priorities and expertise. Additionally, consider expanding the department's focus to include emerging topics, such as the impact of food processing on health. This could provide a more comprehensive approach, reflecting contemporary concerns in both research and education. Integrating these relevant issues would enhance the department's scope and align it with current trends in food science and public health.

Strengthening Professional Development and Collaborative Structures

- **Continuous professional development:** Offer training workshops on teaching and research methodologies (ideally by international experts), digital tools (AI), and leadership skills to support both academic and administrative staff.
- **Establishing clear career advancement pathways and academic title policies** Develop structured career advancement plans that align the Faculty's needs with academic positions, such as associate and full professors, while supporting staff in their professional development. Implement clear policies for the composition and assignment of academic titles, defining the number and distribution of professors, associate professors, and other academic roles to ensure alignment with institutional goals and transparent career progression for employees.
- **Establishing working groups:** Introduce specialized working groups within the Faculty to focus on key themes or projects, promoting collaboration across departments. These groups would allow for more targeted problem-solving, enhance interdisciplinary cooperation, and foster innovation. In the case of scientific collaboration, *interdisciplinary research clusters*, as mentioned in the "Science and Research" section, play a key role.

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Enhancing Governance, Recognition, and Inclusivity

- **International Advisory Board:** Organizing regular meetings of the Advisory Board - experts from outside the institution who provide strategic advice, insights, and recommendations on key issues. Their role is to help guide the Faculty's international partnerships, research initiatives, and global outreach efforts, enhancing the Faculty's position in the international academic community.
- **Recognition and rewards:** Implementing systems to recognize outstanding contributions and achievements could involve not only the established methods such as personal evaluations (bonuses) or the Dean's Award but also additional motivational approaches.
- **Diversity and inclusion:** Foster an inclusive culture that values diversity among staff and establish mechanisms to gather consistent feedback from Faculty members. For instance, provide a suggestion and complaint box, either physically or digitally, where staff can share ideas or raise concerns anonymously. Assign a dedicated team to review these submissions regularly and address them in a transparent manner, such as through monthly updates during Faculty meetings. This practice encourages open communication, fosters trust, and ensures that staff voices are heard and acted upon effectively.
- **Utilizing electronic signatures for staff:** Implementing electronic signatures for staff can streamline administrative processes, enhance efficiency, and reduce paperwork. This system would enable staff to sign documents digitally, saving time and resources.

6. Management of financial resources

Achieving financial stability is crucial for FTZ's growth and sustainability. **Diversifying revenue sources and optimizing resource use** will be essential for supporting both current and new initiatives. An absolute priority is **a detailed review of the Faculty's financial management, including a comprehensive overview of current financial resources and expenditures**. The financial reports of FTZ do not allow for the identification of income and expenses from projects. It is unclear which funds allocated for salaries are covered by Faculty resources and which are funded by projects. Clarifying this distinction is essential for better financial transparency and management.

Key activities for improvement:

Optimizing Financial Management

- **Strategic financial planning and budget management:** Develop long-term financial plans aligned with the Faculty's strategic goals to ensure sustainability and efficiency. Regularly review expenditures to identify cost-saving opportunities without compromising quality. Establish an annual budget approval process, with a detailed evaluation of financial outcomes at the end of each year,

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ensuring oversight and transparency through the Dean's College and Academic Senate.

- **Revising the bonus system:** Conduct a comprehensive review of the current bonus system to ensure it aligns with the Faculty's teaching and research priorities, as well as with the career plans. This approach aims to create a fair and merit-based structure that recognizes and rewards contributions effectively while promoting alignment with institutional and career development goals.
- **Establishing a clear project funding system:** Although the Faculty secures numerous projects annually, ranging from research to development initiatives, there is no transparent system for funding allocation, overhead cost distribution, and utilization. Each project has specific expenditure requirements based on donor conditions, but there are discrepancies among project leaders regarding how these funds are accessed and managed by the Faculty. A standardized system for managing project finances, including clear rules for overhead cost allocation and utilization, is crucial for improved financial oversight and consistency (e.g., 25% sharing of project personal bonuses with the Faculty).

Diversifying Revenue Streams

- **Revenue diversification:** Explore alternative funding sources, including partnerships with industry, alumni contributions, fundraising campaigns and philanthropic donations. For example, strengthen connections with alumni and develop targeted fundraising campaigns to support scholarships or events.
- **Revenue generation through short-term courses (micro-certificates):** Within the framework of lifelong learning, these courses could generate funding, which would then be used to support the development of additional Faculty activities.
- **Strategic partnerships with industry:** Develop partnerships with agribusinesses, NGOs, and government agencies to secure funding for research projects, scholarships, and Faculty development.

7. Promotion & Visibility

Enhancing the Faculty's visibility and reputation is essential for attracting students, public awareness and strategic partners. Strategic communication and marketing efforts can highlight FTZ's strengths and achievements. Recently, the Faculty has significantly increased its PR activities, particularly on social media, which has become the primary source of information for students and prospective applicants. Strengthening targeted advertising is crucial for boosting enrollment across all study programmes. Promoting achievements (projects, research findings, organizing events) beyond the Faculty enhances visibility, fosters a sense of pride, and strengthens the institution's reputation.

Key activities for improvement:

Enhancing Visibility and Engagement with Prospective Students and Alumni

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- **Increasing awareness among potential applicants:** Enhancing the Faculty's online presence and marketing efforts. This is crucial not only for traditional study programmes but also for the online study programmes, ensuring broader visibility and engagement with prospective candidates. Strengthening targeted advertising and increasing digital outreach will help attract a larger pool of students to both on-campus and online academic offerings. Study programmes guarantees, in collaboration with the PR department, should actively and regularly promote the study programmes they are responsible for. This approach ensures that each programme is consistently visible to prospective students, highlighting its unique strengths and offerings.
- **Alumni and student engagement:** Develop programmes to connect with alumni and involve them in Faculty activities and mentorship. Current students should be actively involved in promoting the Faculty, as the majority of new students come to FTZ based on recommendations from alumni. Encouraging students to share their experiences, participate in open days, or engage in student ambassador programmes can leverage their influence to attract prospective students.

Strengthening Faculty Branding and Communication

- **Brand development:** Developing a cohesive brand identity is essential to clearly communicate the Faculty's mission, values, and unique strengths. This can help attract students, partners, and funding opportunities by presenting a unified and professional image.
- **Public relations:** Engaging with the media and participating in public forums enhances the visibility of the Faculty's expertise and contributions to relevant fields. Strengthen relationships with journalists and influencers in academia and industry to amplify Faculty achievements. It is important to regularly share the outcomes of **all research teams and laboratories** within the Faculty. This ensures transparency, encourages knowledge sharing, and promotes collaboration.
- **Regular update of Faculty news:** Updating the Faculty's website and social media regularly ensures stakeholders are informed about the latest developments, research, and events. These platforms are key in maintaining engagement with current and prospective students, staff, and the broader community. Implement a content calendar for consistent updates and diversify the media formats (Newsletters, videos, blogs, etc.) to reach different audiences.
- **Improved website usability:** The Faculty website needs to be more efficiently organized, with updated and relevant information regularly added. Additionally, it's essential to optimize the site for mobile users, as most students, staff, and external visitors access information via smartphones.

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8. Conclusion

This strategic plan for the Faculty of Tropical AgriSciences (FTZ) outlines a forward-looking roadmap to **strengthen its position as a global leader in tropical agriculture, social, economic and environmental sustainability, and rural development**. The plan emphasizes the critical importance of advancing educational quality, fostering international partnerships, enhancing research excellence, and ensuring financial sustainability. By focusing on interdisciplinary approaches, increasing student enrollment, and strengthening staff development, FTZ aims to create a professional and inclusive environment that addresses global challenges while contributing to local and global community development.

To achieve these goals, FTZ should prioritize **targeted promotion, curriculum enhancement, international collaborations, capacity-building initiatives, and effective financial management**. These efforts should be complemented by increased visibility through strategic communication and branding. By **fostering a collaborative, innovative, and transparent culture**, FTZ will be well-positioned to enhance its academic and research impact, attract a diverse and talented students, and contribute meaningfully to sustainable development worldwide.

In conclusion, I would like to share with you my motivation behind the candidacy for the position of Dean of the Faculty. Based on numerous discussions with the Faculty's staff, it is clear that a sense of demotivation has been present for some time. I have decided that I do not wish to remain a passive observer of this situation. Therefore, I am running for the position of Dean to actively contribute to restoring a positive and motivating atmosphere within the Faculty.

I believe I would be a right candidate for the position of Dean because of my extensive experience, proven leadership skills, and deep commitment to the Faculty's growth and success. Over the course of my 20-year professional career, I have had the privilege of coordinating more than 30 international projects, collaborating with numerous experts, and actively engaging within the international association Agrinatura. My absolute priorities are fostering teamwork, finding solutions, and building partnerships. These efforts were recognized this year with the **ICA Excellence Award in the category of Networking**, granted by the international association ICA. I am deeply committed to using my experience to contribute to the development of our Faculty, which is unique and holds immense potential for further growth. With the right environment that supports collaboration and innovation, I believe we can unlock new opportunities for the Faculty's success.