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## Highlights from the 26<sup>th</sup> IFAMA World Conference

John Purchase

CEO: Agbiz

“The importance of realistic agro-food policy is back on the global agenda, whether in the G8, the G20, OECD or other international fora such as the FAO of the United Nations. Changes in food production and nutrition are inevitable as we continuously strive to be resource efficient and innovative in empowering our whole value chain. Only knowledge can build more competitive and sustainable food systems”, said Phil Hogan, European Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development, in his opening address of the 26<sup>th</sup> International Food and Agribusiness Management Association (IFAMA) World Conference in Aarhus, Denmark, this past week.

He further referred to the necessity of creating the right environment for increased investment in food and food production research and development, with the long term goal of achieving greater competitiveness and efficiency. He indicated that farmers also had a specific responsibility in this regard, as well as in ensuring the sustainable and efficient use of scarce resources. The digital revolution, as part of the so-called 4<sup>th</sup> Industrial Revolution, will transform agriculture through Big Data management, precision farming, biological agriculture, biotechnology, and the bio-economy in general.

No longer can the world afford to lose 30% of its food production through food waste. Special mention was made of the European Union focus on Africa and its investments in African food systems, partially driven by the irregular migration of people into Europe. “We need to be far more honest about the scale of the challenges we face on a global level to ensure economic, environmental and social sustainability”, said Commissioner Hogan.

The 26<sup>th</sup> IFAMA World Conference was hosted by IFAMA, the world-renowned Danish Food Cluster, and the Wageningen International Conference on Chain and Network Management (WICaNeM) in the picturesque city of Aarhus in Denmark. The World Conference brought together ~450 academics and agribusiness leaders from close to 50 countries across the globe, including a fairly strong South African contingent. The conference theme of ***Become the Solution: Food Security 2050*** drew a wide range of research topics and addresses, but focussed primarily on the flow of talent in the Food

and Agribusiness Sector (People), Climate Smart Food and Agribusiness Systems (Climate Change), and Better Analytics and Deeper Insight Management (Big Data). In the coming decades, these issues will impact public policies, management, human resource development, technology, international trade, environmental sustainability, resource availability and even domestic and international conflicts. They are intimately interconnected and critical to the ability of the food and agribusiness industry to solve food security challenges.

Dr John Purchase, CEO of Agbiz, moderated one roundtable session and was a keynote speaker in the Food Innovation: HR Management and Development in the opening general session. The importance of human capital and talent was again emphasized, to the extent that it was stated that ***“In future, talent, more than capital, will be the critical factor in production”***. Dr Purchase highlighted the food insecurity situation in Africa, and the dire need to address the policy environment and human capacity development in Africa to improve the food security situation drastically and to meet MDG 1.

An annual highlight and flagship event of the annual IFAMA World Conference is the Student Case Competition where 25 teams of four students each from 12 countries across the world, including three teams from South Africa, competed against one another on a real business case study, as per Harvard Business School Case Study Learning. Various site visits were organized and certainly one of the most interesting was to the Agro Food Park, a totally private sector initiative, on the outskirts of Aarhus. Since being established in 2009, the agro food Park has developed rapidly and today includes 75 companies and institutions. The dairy giant, Arla Foods, is currently building a new R&D Centre in the Agro Food Park, while the Aarhus University will be relocating its Institute of Food to the Agro Food Park.

Participation in IFAMA World Conference events is critical for South Africa as we need to understand what the latest developments and best practice are internationally, and challenge our own agro-food system to adopt new technologies and implement ways of doing business more efficiently. Truly a great learning experience. To boot, South Africa can be proud that Prof Johan van Rooyen of the University of Stellenbosch is currently the President of IFAMA, while Dr Purchase sits on the Board of IFAMA, and this is all testimony to the esteem in which the contribution of all South Africans to IFAMA is held.

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