

Poznań University of Life Sciences

History and luminaries

Summary

The 100th anniversary of university studies in agriculture and forestry is closely related with the 100th anniversary of the University of Poznań, originally named *Wszecznica Piastowska* [the University of the Piasts] and founded in 1919. However, traditions of higher education in agriculture in Poznań are much older. They date back to the second half of the 19th century, when in 1870, on the initiative of Count August Cieszkowski, the Halina School of Agriculture was established in Żabikowo near Poznań. After only six years, that college was suspended by the authorities of the Kingdom of Prussia; as a result, university studies in agriculture could be restored only after Poland regained its independence in 1918.

Within the newly founded University of Poznań, one of the first faculties to be established was the Faculty of Agriculture and Forestry, organised primarily by Professors Bronisław Niklewski and Wiktor Schramm. This institution of higher education had a tremendous impact on the development of agriculture in the Wielkopolska region. While the period of World War II and the first post-war years were dramatic and arduous, research and teaching activities nevertheless continued. Thanks to these persistent efforts, in 1949 two independent university units were founded – the Faculty of Agriculture and the Faculty of Forestry.

In the early 1950s, further changes were introduced as a consequence of the new organisation of higher education in Poland. In 1951 the autonomous Higher School of Agriculture in Poznań was established on the basis of the Faculty of Agriculture which had formerly constituted a part of the University of Poznań, together with the previously founded College of Horticulture and the Faculty of Forestry. This monograph is devoted to the history and accomplishments of that higher education institution, presently known as Poznań University of Life Sciences. This book is part of a multi-volume series on the development of education and science at the University of Poznań and its successors.

The history of university studies in agriculture and forestry in Poznań, which over time evolved to comprise life sciences understood in the broad sense, has been divided into periods during which the institution operated under each of its names: the Higher School of Agriculture, the Agricultural University, from 1996 named the August Cieszkowski Agricultural University, and finally, the present-day Poznań University of Life Sciences. Each of these periods was connected with different external conditions, which to a considerable degree influenced the decision to introduce new fields of study, modifications in curricula and

research. As can be seen, with the course of time, the mission of our University underwent considerable changes.

Apart from academic activity, this unique publication also presents the role of our University community in the socio-political changes taking place in our country. The Higher School of Agriculture (1951–1972) era was marked by constraints imposed by the oppressive communist rule. The state apparatus strictly controlled the higher education system and restricted freedom of research. Many academic teachers faced repression. However, temporary liberalisation in scientific activity and the flourishing student life came with the political changes of 1956. Professors removed from the university several years earlier were reinstated, including e.g. the founders of the Faculty of Agriculture and Forestry mentioned above. Nevertheless, the role of academic teachers in socio-political changes was still limited and the student community tended to adopt a passive and detached stance.

Scarcely 12 years later, the student community of the Higher School of Agriculture, like its counterparts at other Polish universities, was affected by the turmoil of 1968. Students faced the resolution of the university senate stressing their lack of support for their political activism, while the student leaders were subjected to penal and disciplinary proceedings. Nevertheless, despite those and all earlier problems, the dynamic development of the Higher School of Agriculture needs to be commended. By the early 1970s, the number of students had increased 4-fold. Many studies in basic research, plant and animal breeding, farming technology and mechanisation had a significant effect on agriculture in the Wielkopolska region, at the same time, elevating the position of the Higher School of Agriculture among Polish and international universities.

The longest period is associated with the Agricultural University of Poznań (1972–2008). It began with the University receiving new infrastructure, such as e.g. commissioning of the Collegium Maximum, as well as buildings and facilities of the Faculties of Wood Technology and Food Technology. Great changes were also introduced in academic teaching. Successively new fields of studies were offered, starting from the highly regarded biotechnology, followed by environmental protection, biology, landscape architecture and economics in food economy. In the 2003/04 academic year, our University recorded its highest number of students, reaching almost 14 thousand. International cooperation developed dynamically and the University was granted further academic rights. While the political unrest of 1980 and 1981 profoundly affected the situation of the University, the political and economic transformations after 1989 led to the University staff and graduates taking up important positions in state authorities. 1996 saw an important event for the academic community when Count August Cieszkowski was named the patron of the University.

Since 2008, the university has been operating as the Poznań University of Life Sciences, and comprises eight faculties, whose names both before and after that date have been changed several times. This has been related to new study programmes being implemented, as well as new initiatives and research activities being introduced. During this period, our educational offer has been extended further and adapted to changing social and economic needs. In particular, this has been a time of modernisation to our scientific and research infrastructure, with existing facilities being retrofitted and new buildings commissioned. In this respect, particularly important developments have been connected with the opening of the Biocentrum as the facilities for our oldest faculty, the Faculty of Agriculture and Bioen-

gineering, as well as the Clinic of Veterinary Medicine, required for the veterinary medicine programme introduced at our university. Other modern teaching and sports facilities have also been commissioned. The historic buildings of the Cieszkowski Collegium have been refurbished and retrofitted, as have numerous facilities in the University's experimental forest and agricultural stations.

During this period, fundamental changes in the law on higher education have brought in new internal regulations. After 2011, the university was obliged to adapt its educational offer to the National Qualifications Framework and several years later, to the Polish Qualifications Framework. Starting from 2014, our graduates receive Poznań University of Life Sciences diplomas in place of previous national diplomas. Similarly, virtual student records have replaced traditional student record books. Internationalisation of research and study programmes, as well as financing based on qualitative indexes and granted on a competitive basis have become standard practice at Poznań University of Life Sciences.

The foundations for the University's development have always been provided by its academic staff, their ambitions, interests and pursuit of knowledge, commitment to work for the benefit of agriculture and the natural environment, to provide high-quality education and to offer guidance to the younger generation. For this reason, this monograph also focuses on mentors, founders of scientific schools, outstanding teachers and personalities. The chapter on "Scientific luminaries" presents 33 professors who are authorities in various professions and scientific specialisations. Their biographies take the form of essays and are supplemented with additional data specifying the directions of research pursued by the other professors and their followers.

This monograph chronicles the history of Poznań University of Life Sciences. It presents facts and events associated with the development of our university, its transformations, schools and directions of research, and the participation of academic staff and students in scientific, socio-political and economic life. Documented historical data are supplemented with comments and opinions. The past and traditions of Poznań University of Life Sciences are also presented. However, while technological potential and social opportunities have changed tremendously, many fragments of this monograph refer to the present and the future of our university.

The publication of this monograph, while obviously related to the grand jubilee, coincides with major changes in science and higher education. As we are facing new legal regulations introduced by the Law on Higher Education and Science of 20 July 2018, this monograph is a point of reference linking the University's past and future. It is evident that at present, as was stated by Rev. Prof. Michał Heller, the holder of an honorary doctorate of Poznań University of Life Sciences: "[...] scientists, in order to stay afloat, have to treat their knowledge and skills as a commodity subject to the law of markets. However, new grand ideas always originate within a human being, stemming from the passions, thoughts, many personal crises of that person. Despite harsh competition, the pursuit of science remains an existential issue, a matter affecting the very essence of human personality [...] only a person treating science as a lifelong vocation may [thus] be a true scientist" (M. Heller, *Jak być uczonym*, Kraków 2009, p. 44).

Translated by Anna Binczarowska