



**Welcoming remarks by**

**Prof. Esther Kahangi, PhD, EBS**

**Acting Vice Chancellor**

**Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture & Technology**

**During the official opening ceremony of the 2011**

**National Seminar for Patrons and Agriculture Teachers at**

**JKUAT, Juja Campus**

**Friday February 25, 2011**

The Minister for Education, Hon Prof Sam Ongeru;

The National Chairman, Agricultural Society of Kenya, Mrs Alice Kalya;

Young Farmers Clubs of Kenya, National Chairman, Mr. Lawrence Onsongo;

Young Farmers Clubs of Kenya Chief Executive Officer, Mr Batram Muthoka,

Ladies and gentlemen

It is my honour to welcome you all to Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology for the annual National Seminar for Patrons and Agriculture Teachers. I wish to hail and encourage the strategic partnership that exists between A.S.K., Y.F.C.K., the Agriculture Teachers and our University.

First, I want to thank the organizers of this seminar because of their choice of our University to host this important event for the second year running. It is a sign that you have trust and confidence in us. I assure you that we will not disappoint.

Being an agriculture and technology University, we are endowed with all the facilities the agriculture teachers and their students will require to meet their objectives. I wish to reassure you that all these facilities will be at your disposal during this workshop and in future.

From the outset, we must all realize and accept that the single most important and critical resource we have is the youth. Sadly, agriculture is not very popular with them hence our aging farming community and a decline in enrolment in the field both at high school, middle level institutions and universities.

But it would seem clear that if the most talented young people are leaving rural areas and agriculture, it poses a serious problem, not least in terms of future food security. This comes at a time when increasing urbanization and population are placing higher demands on agriculture than ever before. Farming systems need to be both more productive and more sustainable; this requires new ways of farming, and farmers who are capable of responding to new challenges, not least the changing demands of food markets and technology.

If young people are to choose to work in agriculture they need to see it as both a financially rewarding sector, and as modern and challenging. However, for many young people, farming is perceived as old-fashioned, offering little opportunity for making money, and generally being something that you do if you fail your school exams, and cannot get a paid job in some other business. Those who decide to make a living from farming can feel ashamed in front of their friends.

Research suggests that by the age of 15 most people have well-established ways of thinking and behaving. Hence if we wish to influence the behaviour and ideas of young people, we may need to ‘catch them young’. A school-based focus like the Young Farmers Clubs is thus an ideal intervention measure.

As agriculture teachers and patrons, you must strive to inculcate knowledge, ideas, norms and values that will enhance the realization of the full potential of the youth. You must in particular be effective, enthusiastic in your instruction and emphasize the importance of agriculture as a subject and key driver of the economy of the country.

To support Y.F.C.K. and agriculture teachers' bid to have the agriculture subject made compulsory in our secondary schools, JKUAT and other institutions will continue to advise the Government to develop curricula that makes the subject compulsory besides recognizing agricultural sciences. The Government should also strive to make basic agricultural training compulsory to all youth and avail resources for technology investment.

Kenya can embrace technology in its agricultural system to attract the youth who love technologically challenging ventures. Fortunately for us, such technologies as greenhouse, hydroponics, modern dairy farming systems, among others, exist. Students need to be exposed to such technologies through linkages with universities, research institutions and progressive farming enterprises.

As a public institution, we have given our modest contribution by enticing the youth to participate in the agriculture sector through Farmer Voice Radio Project aimed at intensifying the use of radio as a means of disseminating agricultural information to farming communities. Equally, we have annually utilized our consistence participation in the Central A.S.K. show and the Nairobi Trade Fare where we make contact with over 10,000 youths who visit our stand. As a university, we are satisfied with the impact that we are making through this forum judging from the numerous inquiries that we continue to receive from the field. We also receive an estimated three groups of secondary schools groups visiting the university every week and it is a forum that we have used well to popularize agricultural activities to the youth. Furthermore, the university has continued to train hundreds of youth over the years in value addition in a number of JKUAT innovations such as yoghurt, juices and beauty products.

It is my sincere hope that you will find this workshop most beneficial in our struggle to reverse to negative trends and developments in agriculture. I also wish to invite you to

work with us the Government and other partners to enhance food sufficiency in our country and contribute to a greener economy.

It is now my humble duty to invite the Minister for Education to give his address and officially open the Seminar.

Thank you.