

Submission to the All Party Parliamentary Group on Agriculture and Food for Development *Inquiry into the Global Food Crisis* by Dr Eirene Williams on behalf of the Seale-Hayne Future Group

The Seale-Hayne Future Group (SHFG) was formed in early 2003 after the announcement of the closure of Seale-Hayne College. Seale-Hayne was founded in the early 20th century for the specific purpose of agricultural and technical education, and had developed an international reputation for teaching and research in the rural sector. It has a productive 177 ha College farm and many purpose-built facilities. The College merged into the University of Plymouth in the 1990s and was subsequently closed by the University in 2005. SHFG comprises ex-governors of the College, ex-staff, ex-students, local councilors and business people and others interested to see an appropriate future use of the estate.

SHFG shares the many concerns over future global food security being explored by the APPG. Many individual members of SHFG have had professional involvement with the issues listed in the "Call for Evidence". However this submission focuses on question 8, specifically the role of academia and research, and hence to some extent on questions 7, 9 and 10.

SHFG believes fervently that a mixture of theoretical and practical teaching and research such as that developed at Seale-Hayne over the decades is the most appropriate way for academia to address problems of food security, alongside environmental and sustainability issues. SHFG does not subscribe to the commonly held belief that the person in front of the computer screen or in the committee room has, or needs more knowledge and intellect than the person operating the plough or the fishing net. Theoretical understanding is important, but will not feed the world without experienced and inspirational practitioners and managers.

Seale-Hayne College, Wye College and others in the UK as well as research institutes (all of which espoused applied and practical approaches to the advancement of agriculture) have been closed unilaterally. Reasons given usually include following the subject choices of current students and the need to cut costs incurred in running land-based facilities. SHFG holds that this is short-sighted, and should be examined in a national if not international context. Colleges with land could and probably should become exemplars of self-sufficiency and cost and carbon neutrality. Seale-Hayne College in particular with its existing facilities is immediately available with vacant possession and is ideally situated for potential synergies with Exeter and Plymouth Universities to become a global centre for research into the problems that the world is facing.

British educational institutions and systems have been models for those overseas for centuries. Foreign students studying in the UK, and UK graduates working abroad have achieved beneficial sharing of ideas and practices. Seale-Hayne College has much to be proud of in this respect. Its work addressed most of the topics listed in question 9; exchanging science, skills and technology as well as management expertise internationally through shared practical experiments and projects. SHFG would not want universities such as Kabarak in Kenya (which has a large university farm and excellent facilities) to continue to focus only on 'indoor' subjects when they have such potential to lead in implementing sustainable food production teaching and research.

SHFG takes a more traditional view that the role of academia is to pass on and generate knowledge, to innovate and experiment, and to assess and debate freely the pressing issues of the day. We feel that, due to its departure from practical land-based education, UK academia is no longer well equipped to play its part in generating long-term predictable and sustainable development for those affected in the developing world or at home. The group strongly feels that the UK must have a commitment to addressing issues of global food security. We urge that UK universities and research institutes be encouraged or required by government, to reinstate and respect applied agricultural education and research, and that they should be funded appropriately.

Dr Eirene Williams CEnv MIEEM MifL was a Principal Lecturer in Rural Resource Management at Seale-Hayne College from 1986 until it closed in 2005, a Dartmoor farmer for 30 years, an agricultural VSO volunteer in Malawi in the 1970s, and is currently a member of the International Committee of the European Conferences on Higher Agricultural Education