



Passion for agriculture

drives new Dean of
Agrisciences

It was already as a young boy on his way to boarding-school by train between Johannesburg and Cape Town that Prof Mohammad Karaan lost his heart to the endless farmlands, open lands and vegetation that flashed past the train window. It was this and the many memories of his grandparents' stories about their life on a farm in East Griqualand that further inspired his love for agriculture.

Prof Karaan – Stellenboscher by birth – who obtained all his degrees at Stellenbosch University (SU), has lectured in the Department of Agricultural Economics for the past 11 years, first as lecturer and later as senior lecturer. In 1992 he started work as an economist and policy analyst for the Development Bank of Southern Africa, after which he served as Head: Research of the Rural Foundation between 1994 and 1996.

Prof Karaan first enrolled at SU as a student in 1987. The University that he entered then as a freshman, however, was a completely different institution to the one at which he works today. Black students were disadvantaged at both a social and an academic level. That experience, says Prof Karaan, is what now drives him to bring about greater integration among students and to sensitise personnel to understand and manage cultural differences and the effect of the institutional environment on student performance with wisdom.

Prof Karaan's passion for agriculture has led to close ties with leaders in the field, such as Prof Eckard Kassier, former Chairperson of the Department of Agricultural Economics, Prof Nick Vink, current Chairperson of the Department, and Prof Ralph Christy, the first Afro-American President of the American Agricultural Economics Association.

"Over the past eight years Prof Christy has become my mentor. I went to America to meet him and we became good friends and colleagues. One day, he asked me, 'Why don't we go and do GOOD together in the world?'" remembers Prof Karaan.

This question led to the establishment of the Making Markets Matter project, which

is operated in conjunction with Cornell University in America and trains emergent agribusinesses in Africa. Prof Karaan is the local coordinator of the project and focuses on business and marketing strategies in the field of agribusiness.

Prof Karaan is also very active in agribusiness circles and serves on the boards of various companies, such as CapeAgri, Agricol Seed, the Melsegger group, Southern Oil Ltd, the Bester Feed and Grain Exchange and Klein Karoo International. He is furthermore frequently approached to advise government, various bodies in the industry and companies. He has penned seven articles in trade journals, five chapters in books and twenty reports. He has also presented sixteen papers, five of these at international congresses. He is a sought-after speaker and commentator in the field of agricultural economics and has presented more than a hundred occasional lectures and seminars.

Prof Karaan is President of the Agricultural Economics Association of South Africa and member of the International Agribusiness Management Association. He was former chairperson of the National Agricultural Marketing Council, where he is currently Vice-Chairperson. He was at the helm of the ministerial committee on agricultural marketing in South Africa and has served as advisor to the parliamentary portfolio committee on agriculture.

Prof Karaan believes that the agricultural sector faces important challenges in respect of sustainability, transformation and food security. "SU can, in its own way, react to these challenges and, in the process, create a future for itself," he says. **m**