

Weblog Orientation on International Scientific Careers

Tuesday June 22nd

The second day of the Study Tour of GLV Idun started with the breakfast in the Stay Okay Hostel in The Hague. After a nice long night of sleep, we prepared for our third company visit. At 09:30 we left The Hague and headed for Fijnaart, a small town in the municipality of Moerdijk, Zuid-Holland. At 11 o'clock we arrived at Rijk Zwaan and were friendly welcomed with coffee by our hosts Kees van Dun and Joska van der Hout. Rijk Zwaan is a company specialized in plant seed enrichment. Rijk Zwaan is a family business that has grown out to one of the ten largest seed enrichment companies of the world, and a world leader in development of lettuce, spinach seeds, and an important player in development of sweet pepper, cucumber and tomato seeds.

The case study provided by Rijk Zwaan evolved around the investments in new sequencing techniques. The main question was; what are the possibilities of investing in third generation sequencing techniques for Rijk Zwaan, and what risks and benefits are involved in this investment. Third generation sequencing is a technique which allows researchers to sequence samples at a very high speed and at a very low cost. This data could help Rijk Zwaan solve many problems concerning the development of new plant varieties and their seeds. Anita Minnen and Trijnia Pool gave a thorough overview on the subject, and the main conclusion was that Rijk Zwaan should seek partnerships with fellow enterprises and should stimulate research in these techniques by awarding grants to young academics from either companies or universities. After the presentation of the students, Rijk Zwaan gave a tour around their facilities and explained the process of seed production and new species development. One thing that really struck us was the flowering iceberg plants growing into one and a half meter long flowering bushes. It was really interesting to see how the flavor of the consumer varies between different countries, each nation seems to have its own favorite lettuce type. It was quite fascinating to see how the growers at Rijk Zwaan tune into consumers' needs.

After an interesting tour around the facilities, the students went on the bus again to move on to Antwerp. Tomorrow they will be going to the Belgian town of Mol to visit VITO, a research institute that among other things is involved in biofuels research. The students case study of tomorrow is about the possibilities to use leftover organic waste to produce biofuels