

# THE INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL OF AGRICULTURAL SCIENCES ANNUAL REPORT 2020-2021



**THE INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL OF AGRICULTURAL SCIENCES**

The Hebrew University  
of Jerusalem

The Robert H. Smith Faculty of  
Agriculture, Food and Environment



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OUR KNOWLEDGE  
YOUR GROWTH

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## MESSAGE FROM THE VICE DEAN FOR INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS AND HEAD OF THE INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL OF AGRICULTURAL SCIENCES



*"I have indeed gained  
a lot of skills, knowledge  
and I believe I am going to  
use all the expertise  
I have gained during my  
time at the university  
to contribute to my  
community and  
the rest of the world."*

Ritah Namaweje, Uganda,  
Plant Sciences Graduate

Dear Friends,

We are happy to present to you the 2020-2021 annual report of the International School of Agricultural Sciences of the Robert H. Smith Faculty of Agriculture, Food and Environment of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. This academic year was the most challenging we have ever had. Our International MSc students managed to enter the country but all their studies during the first semester were on Zoom. However, it is clear from their letters of appreciation that this did not affect their experience. They all mention the knowledge and skills they gained, not only in class, but also through hands-on experiences in the field, on our unique experimental farm and in the laboratories of our researchers. The 2021 Glasgow Climate Summit dealt not only with issues of climate change but also with the consequential issue of food security. The International School of Agricultural Sciences rises to these global challenges by giving our students knowledge at the forefront of science and technology that can help them and their communities deal with these pressing issues. We believe that our programs are responsible for improving the lives of our students and alumni, as well as their surrounding communities and, in large, their countries. In this report, we would like to share with you our students' stories, accomplishments and highlights. One of these is the fact that despite all the COVID-19-related challenges, 17 out of this year's 18 International MSc Plant Sciences students have transferred to the thesis track – an unprecedented 94%, the highest number in the history of our program. This additional year, during which they will work in the lab shoulder to shoulder with our researchers, will enable them to apply the different methods they have acquired to the problems farmers face in their home countries. As we stay in touch with our alumni, we are looking forward to hear these future success stories. The Viticulture and Enology program is turning out to be a huge success as well: We are proud to share that all our graduates from the first and second cohorts are now working in the wine sector. We are certain that the newly planted on-campus experimental vineyard will enhance our students' hands-on experience and expertise even further.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Aliza Fleischer". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Professor Aliza Fleischer

## OUR VISION

The Robert H. Smith Faculty's teaching and research activities have always played a central role in advancing agriculture to strengthen Israel's economy while training tomorrow's scientists and agriculturists. The Smith Faculty's mission is to protect and rehabilitate the environment while increasing food production and reducing world hunger; mobilize agriculture to meet human health needs; improve the quality and purity of agricultural products; and share the benefits of Israeli research and innovation with other nations. The International School is dedicated to disseminating the Smith Faculty's knowledge and expertise throughout the international community by providing opportunities to acquire advanced academic knowledge and observe up-to-date practical applications. The educational programs encourage students to explore new fields and cultures, exchange ideas and experiences, contribute to capacity building and problem solving, and create partnerships for future cooperation.



## THE INTERNATIONAL MSc PROGRAMS

The International Master of Science programs are 12-month, accelerated, non-thesis degrees in one of four fields of study: Plant Sciences or Environmental Quality Sciences, held biennially in even years, and Animal Sciences or Nutritional Sciences, held biennially in odd years. To earn the degree, students are required to complete 40 course credits. Excelling students may apply to transfer to a thesis track at the Robert H. Smith Faculty of Agriculture, Food and Environment. In addition, the International School offers an 18-month Master of Science in Viticulture & Enology.

*“During the studies, I was able to increase my knowledge on agricultural science, thus improving my confidence to address matters of research and sustainable food production. I also made many friends from different parts of the world, who have become important links for my professional and social networking.”*

Martin Gitonga, Kenya, Plant Sciences Graduate

## 2020-2021 PROGRAMS

### MSc in Plant Sciences

The international Master of Science in Plant Sciences, academically headed by Prof. Alon Samach, prepares students to become leading professionals in present and future agriculture and adapt their new knowledge to local conditions in their home countries. Students acquire advanced insight and skills in the scientific basis and principles of crop plant production, the environmental impact of agricultural activity, the analysis of specific cropping systems, the provision of solutions to practical problems and the adaption of appropriate solutions to various situations.

The class of 2020-21 consisted of 18 students hailing from 13 different countries. Seventeen students, an unprecedented 90 percent, were accepted to a thesis track and are now continuing their studies at the Faculty.

### MSc in Viticulture & Enology

The international Master of Science in Viticulture & Enology, academically headed by Prof. Zohar Kerem, is the first MSc degree of its kind to be approved by the National Council for Higher Education of Israel. The biennial, 18-month program spans four consecutive semesters and is comprised of theoretical studies on campus and practical hands-on learning in the vineyard and winery. Students also participate in a professional workshop overseas and are offered the opportunity to intern at a commercial winery in Israel or abroad.

The second cohort of this unique program included ten Israeli and three international students. They concluded their studies in December 2020 and are currently all working in the viticulture and enology sector.

The third cohort started in March 2021. It includes nine Israeli and five international students from different countries.

### COVID-19 and quarantine

The COVID-19 pandemic had a major effect on the 2020-21 academic year. Due to much uncertainty, we decided to focus our efforts and offer only one program, Plant Sciences.

Upon their arrival, the students entered a 14-day quarantine in Reisfeld Guesthouse, located on the Faculty campus. We supplied them with food, toiletries and laptops and tried to make their quarantine as comfortable as possible. Once vaccines became available, all students were inoculated and received Green Passes.

Despite the preference for frontal classes, the university declared that the first semester would be held online and all the lessons and activities, other than outdoor activities, took place on Zoom. Frontal classes resumed in the second semester.

### Orientation on Zoom

All our orientation activities were held on Zoom, including an introduction and greetings session, Introduction to Israel presentation, library tutorial, and medical insurance tutorial.

In the following weeks, we held a Safeguarding tutorial, a familiarization session with alumni of the program, an Academic and Scientific Ethics tutorial, individual personal meetings and a meeting with a psychologist about dealing with stress.

Finally, since outdoor activities were permitted, we held a physical tour of the campus.

### Experimental Farm visit

In the beginning of the first semester, the students visited the Faculty of Agriculture's experimental farm near the campus, which is where they subsequently met every Thursday morning in the second semester for the Crops Management Workshop and to grow their own vegetables. This trip, led by the academic head of program, Prof. Alon Samach, was the students' first opportunity to physically meet the head of the program, and also provided a much-needed respite from the Zoom lessons.



### Trip to Jaffa

Just ahead of Christmas, the students went to the city of Jaffa for the first sightseeing excursion of the year. They were thrilled to leave the Zoom classes behind for a tour of the old city and a taste of the local street food. The tour culminated at the Christmas tree in the center of town, under the Jaffa clock tower.



### Field trip to Kibbutz Sde Eliyahu

The students embarked on a field trip with Dr. Einat Bilu, the lecturer of the Integrated Pest Management course, to the BioBee plant in Kibbutz Sde Eliyahu. BioBee offers natural pollination and biological pest control solutions. This trip instilled in our students the understanding that it is possible to increase food production and control crop pests without harming the environment.



### Trip to Jerusalem

One of the students' favorite trips every year is the visit to Jerusalem with a professional tour guide. After walking around the four quarters of the Old City and the Western Wall, and hearing about the history of the area, the group sampled some of the delightful treats that Shuk Machne Yehuda has to offer.

### Second-hand clothing market

Second-hand clothing is better for the environment and saves the students money. We initiated a pilot second-hand market, collected clothing from the entire Faculty staff and made it available for free to all the Faculty's international students.

### Sightseeing trip to Masada and the Dead Sea

Led by a professional tour guide, the students toured the ruins of Masada and learned about the site's history and archaeology. They rode the cable car up and down the steep mountain, taking in the breathtaking views along the way. After Masada, the students floated in the Dead Sea and enjoyed the therapeutic properties of the Dead Sea mud.



### Visit to the Shimon Peres Center for Peace and Innovation

The students learned about Shimon Peres's life-long quest to bring peace to the Middle East and were inspired by the display of Israeli innovations and inventions in different fields. They greatly enjoyed the virtual reality activities offered and concluded that it was a truly unique experience.

### Presentation by Biotechnology Company CollPlant

We wanted to expose the students to a sample of the thriving agritech sector in Israel, so we invited Dr. Nadav Orr, an alumnus of the Faculty of Agriculture and Vice President of R&D at CollPlant, to give a talk about the company. CollPlant develops innovative technologies and products for tissue regeneration and organ manufacturing using plant-based technology, specifically the tobacco plant. The students were fascinated by Dr. Orr's presentation, which detailed the processes that go into growing the tobacco and using the leaves to create collagen, as well as the complexities of founding and running an agritech business. This presentation inspired our students and showed them how far their degree in Plant Sciences can take them.



### Lecture by a Holocaust survivor

Dr. Zipporah Gershon, a lecturer in our Nutritional Sciences program and food safety expert, is a Holocaust survivor with a fascinating story. We invited her to talk with the international students about her childhood during the Holocaust and how she and her family survived. This was a unique opportunity to learn about this dark period in Jewish history first-hand. The students asked many questions that related to some of the armed conflict areas in their own countries. Dr. Gershon also stressed the importance of education and learning as a method of coping and thriving in difficult times, a message so relevant to our students during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### Class field trips

An integral part of our programs is taking students on field trips to observe practical applications of the theories studied in class. Dr. Hagai Yasuor, who teaches Advances in Vegetable Production, took the students to visit peanut fields, a packaging plant and the R&D center in Ramat Negev-Ashalim; Dr. Etan Pressman, who teaches the Practical Workshop in Crop Management, took the students to the Hazera seed production plant; Ms. Lea Mazor, who teaches the Seed Production course, hosted a visit to Volcani Institute; and Dr. Effi Tripler, the Basic Irrigations Systems teacher, took the students to learn and observe irrigation systems in fields in the Negev.



### Closing party at the Experimental Farm

The Crops Management Workshop is one of the highlights of the program, in which our students learn how to grow and manage crops from seed to harvest, farm to table. In June, our students gathered at the farm to reap what they had sown and enjoyed a bountiful harvest of vegetables.



### Oral seminars

The annual oral seminars are the last, and perhaps, most challenging requirement for our MSc degree. It is the culmination of a very intense year. After completing their presentations, we held a small impromptu celebration with wine, cake and music; the students were thrilled and relieved to have completed their studies.

### International MSc Closing Ceremony

The closing ceremony of the 2020-21 cohort was a relatively intimate affair, about 70 people.

The event was also livestreamed on Facebook, so that the graduates' families and friends could watch and be part of the event. The livestream generated 1900 views, 114 comments and 138 likes – by far our most popular Facebook post ever.

The event was graced by the presence of members of the diplomatic corps from Zambia, Nigeria, Ghana, Rwanda, Tanzania and Myanmar, as well as Oron Shagrir, the Vice President for International Affairs of the Hebrew University, and Yossi Gal, the Vice President for University Advancement and External Relations of the Hebrew University. One of the highlights was the students' performance of the song "Ani Veata Neshane et HaOlam" (You and I will change the world). The ceremony ended with a great dance party with a live band.





## MSC IN VITICULTURE & ENOLOGY 2020-2021 CALENDAR

Because of COVID-19 limitations, the second cohort had to complete their studies on Zoom, but still were able to go on all the local field trips, though they could not attend the workshop in Bordeaux. They will be invited to join the third cohort's trip to Bordeaux, planned for March 2022, so they do not miss out on this unique opportunity.

The third cohort is studying frontally and enjoying a multitude of tours and workshops that supplement their education.

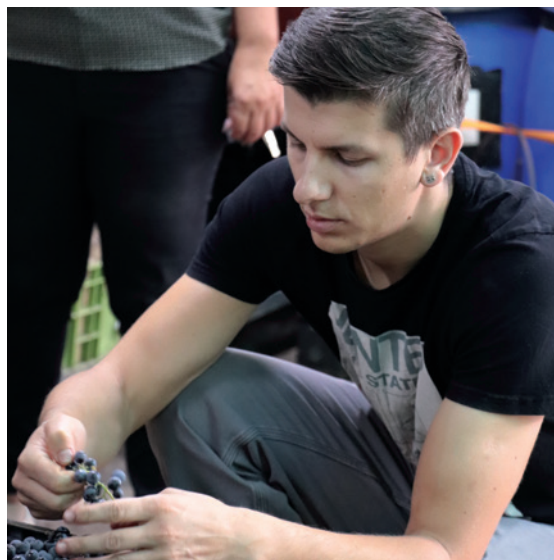
### Winery tours

Tours of wineries enable our students to observe first-hand the practical application of course material. In 2020-21, we visited the Tulip, Teperberg and Nana wineries. Many more tours are planned for 2021-22.



### Grape harvesting at Mazkeret Batya Vineyard

The MSc program covers all aspects of winemaking, from the vineyard to the bottle, including theoretical studies, experiential work at Mazkeret Batya Vineyard and winemaking at its winery, in cooperation with Soreq Vineyard. During the summer, the students harvested the grapes they helped grow and will produce their own wine in the academic year 2021-2022.



## Vineyard tours

Vineyard tours help the students understand the science of grape growing and harvesting. This year's tours included Kidron, Kibbutz Merav and Bekaot, and the experimental vineyard at Ramat Hanegev R&D.



## Workshops with Itay Lahat

Tasting workshops improve our student's ability to judge, analyze and critique wines. The students had three tasting workshops with Itay Lahat, a wine consultant and winemaker - on Rose wines, sensory wine tasting and faulty wine tasting - to learn how to identify these types of wines.



### Establishment of the on-campus Experimental Vineyard

As the program gains recognition both locally and internationally as one of the more attractive study programs of the Hebrew University, we move forward with improving our infrastructure. We have initiated the establishment of our own study winery, an advanced laboratory, and a unique vineyard, all on campus. The 600-square-meter experimental vineyard, planted thanks to a generous contribution from Baron Éric de Rothschild, includes a variety of local and international wine-grapes: Chardonnay, Malbec, Merlot, Shiraz, Cabernet Sauvignon and many others.

Our students will maintain the vineyard, and, as a result, will become intimately acquainted with the various cultivars and with irrigation, soil and plant-protection issues in our area. We are certain that this will immensely enhance the hands-on experience they gain.



### Second cohort Graduation Ceremony

Despite COVID-19's challenges, the second cohort successfully completed the program and graduated in May 2021. The intimate ceremony took place at the lovely Hadar Winery, owned by one of the graduates. Distinguished guests included Tzachi Dotan, CEO of the Israel Wine and Grapes Board, and Avi Feldstein, a prominent Israeli winemaker, who gave a lecture entitled Ethics and Aesthetics - Locality in the Wine World.





## SUPPORTERS AND FRIENDS

The International School's activities and accomplishments are made possible by the generous support and continuing commitment of our donors and collaborators.

The International School thanks the following sponsors and organizations for their invaluable partnership.

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# OUR KNOWLEDGE YOUR GROWTH

## THE INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL OF AGRICULTURAL SCIENCES

The International School of Agricultural Sciences of the Robert H. Smith Faculty of Agriculture, Food and Environment at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem has been providing English-language programs in the agricultural, food and environmental sciences since 1988. As the only faculty of agriculture in Israel, the Smith Faculty is the source for most of Israel's agricultural achievements.

More than 3,000 participants from around the globe have attended graduate degree programs and short training courses and workshops at the International School.



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