

SU prof chosen to lead agricultural engineers worldwide

Prof Umezuruike Linus Opara, Stellenbosch University professor and research chair, has been elected as the incoming president of the [International Commission of Agricultural and Biosystems Engineering](#) (Commission Internationale du Génie Rural or CIGR) - a worldwide umbrella agriculture engineering organisation.



CIGR - Prof Opara and Prof Juliuszewski

The organisation consists of a network of regional and national [societies of agricultural engineering](#) as well as private and public companies and individuals globally.

Prof Opara was elected to the position during the recent [International Conference on Agricultural Engineering](#) held in Denmark and organised by the [European Society of Agricultural Engineers](#) under the auspices of the CIGR.

The election means that he will first serve on the Presidium of the CIGR for two years as incoming president, before taking up the position as president around 2019. He will then serve the CIGR for another two years as past president. Prof Opara is the first engineer from sub-Saharan Africa to be elected into this position and his term coincides with the 90th anniversary of the CIGR.

He will juggle his new responsibilities in tandem with those placed on him as the holder of the DST-NRF South African Research Chair in Postharvest Technology at Stellenbosch University and as a distinguished professor in the Department of Horticultural Science.

Prof Opara, who has been an SU staff member since 2009, is a recipient of the 2016 [African Union Kwame Nkrumah Continental Scientific Award](#) for senior researchers. He qualified as an agricultural engineer from universities in Nigeria and New Zealand, and serves on numerous international committees and editorial boards. He is a fellow of the South African Institution of Agricultural Engineers. Prof Opara is also the founding president of the [Pan African Society for Agricultural Engineering](#) (AfroAgEng), which was established during a CIGR International Technical Symposium held at

Stellenbosch University in 2012.

His multi-disciplinary research team is the leading group worldwide working on postharvest practices that improve the postharvest handling, packaging and marketing of pomegranate fruit. His research group also tests and develops packaging and quality control methods relevant to the handling and storage of fresh fruits and vegetables such as table grapes, citrus and apples. These efforts are focused on alleviating unnecessary food loss and waste, maintaining quality and adding value in the fruit and vegetable sector.

Although Stellenbosch University does not have a degree in agricultural engineering per se, Prof Opara says he is looking forward to using the new opportunity presented to him. He hopes it will help to deepen and strengthen the contributions of engineering and related programmes at SU in the agriculture, food and related sectors.

“The work of individual SU staff and postgraduate students in these areas are widely recognised by our peers, locally and internationally,” he says. “Through collaboration and co-supervision we have several PhD and MEng students registered in the faculties of Engineering and AgriSciences working on different research topics in agricultural and biosystems engineering.”

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