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SPECIAL REPORT GREECE

AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION

Pioneer school puts business into farming

Kerin Hope profiles a growing institution

After 101 years of providing a high school education and vocational training for young Greek farmers, the American Farm School at Thessaloniki in northern Greece is poised to become a fully fledged university institution.

Perrotis College, the school's tertiary education arm, already offers a two year management programme focusing on agribusiness, marketing for the food industry and farm production systems.

The associate degree programme, taught in English, will be expanded this year into a BSc course that will qualify graduates for jobs in professional farming and the food industry in Greece and abroad.

"The current programme offers mid-managerial level studies, and most Greek graduates go on to work in family owned businesses. The BSc programme will provide students with more opportunities," says Evangelos Vergos, dean of Perrotis College.

The farm school, a non-profit organisation, was founded in 1903 by John Henry House, an American missionary working in Bulgaria, using funds left over from ransoming a woman colleague who was kidnapped by bandits during a Balkan uprising together with other donations.

House brought 10 orphans from Thessaloniki to Monastir in Macedonia to learn farming skills above the level of subsistence agricul-

ture as part of a broader education.

The school recently revived its connections with the Balkan countries to the north by offering scholarships to students from Bosnia, Macedonia, Bulgaria, Albania and Serbia.

More than half the 80 students attending college level courses come from these countries. But rather than become professional farmers, most want to specialise in agri-business or agricultural marketing, Dr Vergos says.

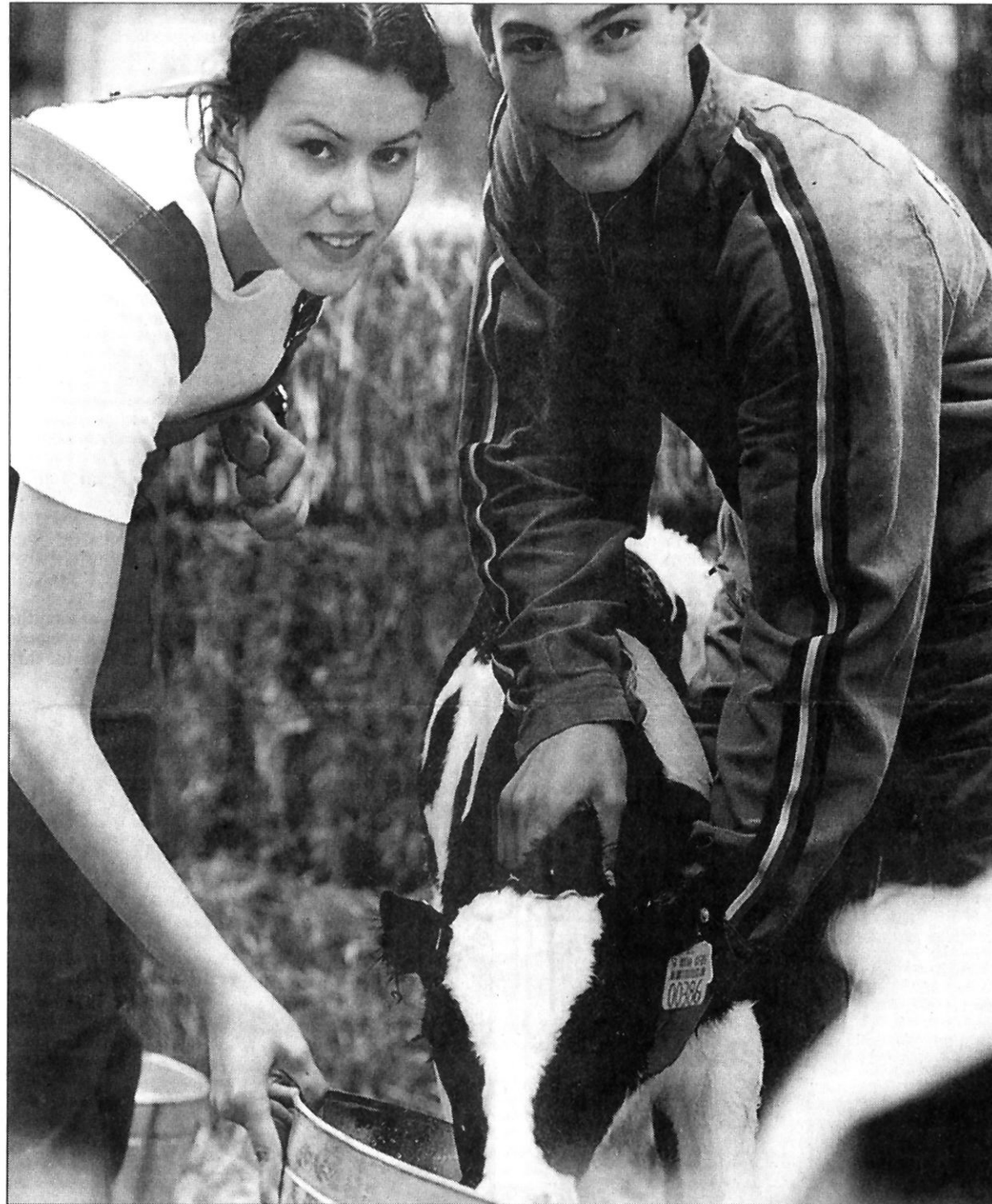
Jurgen Peci worked last summer as an intern, a required part of the college

'The future isn't about output, it's about niche production and adding value'

programme, at a microfinance bank in his home town of Korce in southern Albania. "The first loan I handled was for a farmer to buy a cow," he says.

"I want to finish a full degree and perhaps work abroad, then set up an agricultural business in Albania."

Until now students have transferred under partnership arrangements to universities in the US, the Netherlands and the UK to complete their degrees. In a



Education rooted in the soil: the American Farm School, started a century ago with ransom money by an American missionary, aims to inject a higher level of professionalism and agri-business consciousness

reciprocal programme launched last year, students from Larenstein University, the Dutch partner, came to Thessaloniki to attend courses at Perrotis College.

Manuel Stefanakis, a US expert on sustainable development who took over last

year as the school's president, says Greek agriculture is entering a period of dramatic change as European Union subsidies diminish over the next seven years.

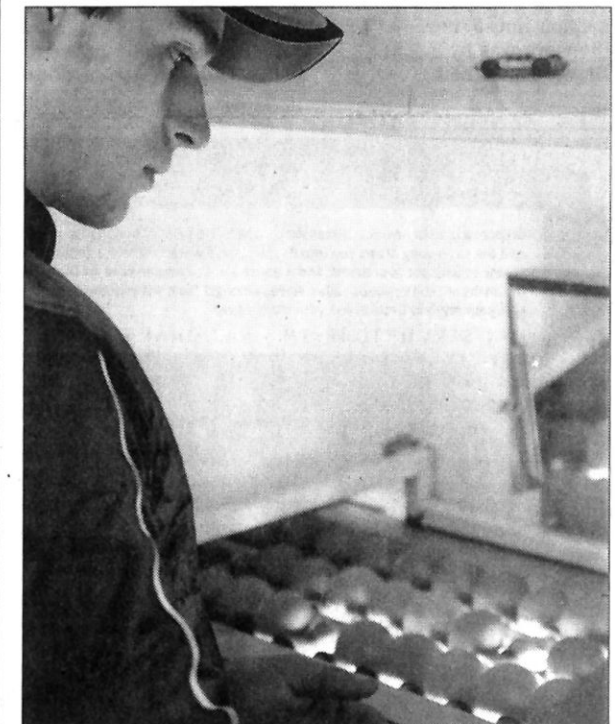
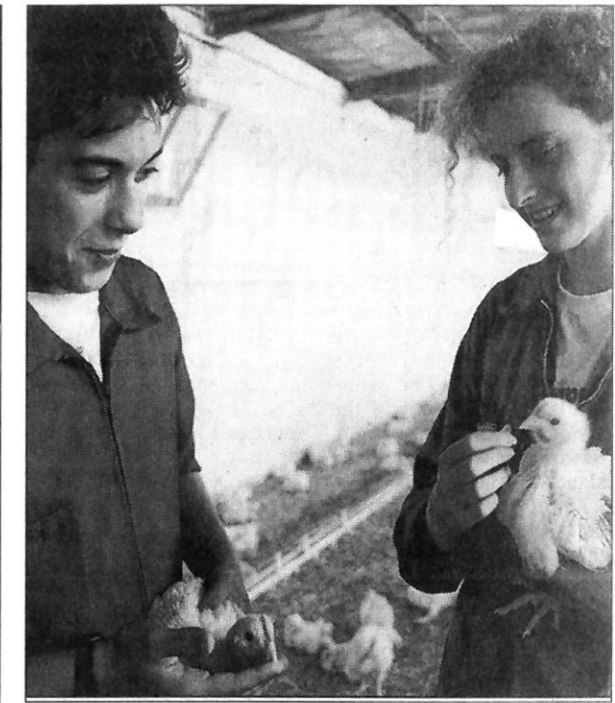
"The future isn't about output, it's about niche production and adding value.

We aim to teach the next generation of farmers the professional skills they'll need," he says.

Both high school and college students provide the workforce for the school's 150 acre working farm. Like most Greek holdings, it is

fragmented with a commercial operation on campus and an experimental farm 15km away in an environmentally protected zone in the Axios river delta.

The campus farm is credited with using the first mechanised tractor in



Greece in the 1920s and introducing pasteurised milk in the 1930s. Students help to produce, package and sell fresh milk, eggs, poultry and organic wine to local consumers and an Athens based supermarket chain.

Among other experimental

crops, the Axios farm grows sesame under an agreement with a Thessaloniki company that produces and exports halva, a Greek sweet. The company wants to promote local production as an alternative to using imported sesame.