



150
YEARS

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LUFA Kiel

150 Years

On 1 January 1871, a good 150 years ago, the „Agrikulturchemische Versuchsstation 1) zu Kiel“ was founded in a back building in Holstenstraße in Kiel. The impetus for this came from Kiel's „Landwirtschaftlicher Generalverein“ (general agricultural association), which had thus laid the foundation stone for an important feed and food laboratory, today's AGROLAB LUFA GmbH.

The Beginnings were in Fertiliser Control

The main purpose of the experimental station during the burgeoning agricultural analytics was initially to control the quality of fertiliser and to examine farmland soils and farmyard basic fodder. Later, investigations for the dairy industry were added. Systematic feeding and vegetation experiments served to scientifically question traditional agricultural practice. The publicly financed institute was to derive recommendations for farmers from its research in order to improve crop yields and breeding success. Basic agricultural research was therefore another task of the laboratory for a long time.

The field of activity expanded steadily. The rented back building had become too small for the concentrated feedstuff and seed tests. To meet the new requirements and with increasing analysis orders in addition to research, a new location was sought in 1874. The city of Kiel gave the Institute a 76-acre plot of land on Kronshagener Weg. The new building was inaugurated in December 1877. The enlargement now also provided space for reorganisation, more research, teaching and council.



The birth of the Food Analytics

In addition to the agricultural chemistry department, a separate dairy department was founded. With the chemical, microbiological and sensory quality testing of milk and dairy products, food analysis was thus established at LUFA. In addition, this also created the basis for the then Federal Institute for Dairy Research and the Max Rubner Institute in Kiel that emerged from it.

In the following decades, the testing station developed into an „Agricultural Testing and Research Institute“ and joined the German umbrella organisation VDLUFA. In the cooperation and exchange with the other state agricultural testing centres, analytical focal points crystallised, e.g. residue analysis, which still shape the good image of the institute in the industry today, also internationally.



LUFA becomes LUFA-ITL

The name „Landwirtschaftliche Untersuchungs- und Forschungsanstalt“ (LUFA) was probably used as early as 1874. However, this is only verifiable since 1948.

Around 1960, the LUFA again reached its spatial limits. The institute then moved into a new building on Gutenbergstraße.

Another important milestone in the history of the laboratory was the merger with the Institute for Animal Health and Food Quality (ITL) in 1988, which gave food analysis in Kiel another major boost.



New upward trend through sale to AGROLAB

2001 Privatisation



Over time, not only did the complexity of the tasks increase, but bureaucracy also thrived and outdated management structures hindered further development. Maintaining laboratory operations was only possible with subsidies. The deficit increased year after year and demanded a sustainable turnaround for all involved: state government, chamber, taxpayers and, last but not least, staff as well as clients from trade, industry and the farming community.

In 2001, the Schleswig-Holstein Chamber of Agriculture sold LUFA-ITL to the AGROLAB GROUP, an up-and-coming, privately organised laboratory group that had focused on modern, IT-supported service analytics in the environmental and agricultural sectors since its foundation in 1986.

The challenging experiment of transforming a semi-governmental, tradition-bound „institution“ into a highly modern and, above all, profitable and service-oriented testing institute was an entrepreneurial venture and was initially followed with scepticism, not only in Kiel. Through courageous and wise decisions by the management under Dr. Paul Wimmer and the willpower of the remaining staff, who were convinced of success, LUFA succeeded in transforming itself into a competitive service company on the basis of its immense wealth of knowledge and experience. After a surge in investment and fundamental restructuring, LUFA reached the profit zone just two years after the takeover.

Expansion and Relocation

Since privatisation, the Kiel laboratory has undergone enormous development. In 2002, the municipal water laboratory was integrated and the state measuring station for radioactivity was also transferred into the hands of AGROLAB. The animal diagnostics division of the former ITL found a new home in the state laboratory in Neumünster, just 35 km away. The specialised AGROLAB sites in Sarstedt and Oberdorla took over agricultural soil testing. Nevertheless, it became too cramped again in Gutenbergstraße as early as 2005.

Renovation of the laboratory buildings, which also no longer met technical standards, was not feasible during ongoing laboratory operations and on the existing property. A new building and a move towards Hamburg were considered. But a laboratory is only as good as its staff - and most of them are rooted in and around Kiel. This was a very important reason for the management to keep the new LUFA location in Kiel. On the business campus in Dr.-Hell-Straße in Kiel-Suchsdorf, the opportunity arose to convert a huge, vacant production hall into a state-

of-the-art laboratory according to latest standards. In the process, the experienced AGROLAB strategists systematically planned the workplaces step by step along the analytical process chains, which are now also fully accredited according to ISO quality standards and environmental standards. The result was a large laboratory that was unprecedented until then. The innovative concept, cost efficiency, work safety and the associated speed, flexibility and service quality have put LUFA analytics on a future-proof and sustainable footing.





Story of Success Continues

After the move in 2006, the halls initially seemed almost oversized, but just 10 years later, laboratory operations once again reached the spatial capacity limit. Due to the strong growth, LUFA-ITL also threatened to lose some of the dynamism and organisational flexibility of the previous years. It was time for change again, so as not to jeopardise the hard-earned competitive advantages in a demanding market environment. The company management decided to take another courageous step:

Make 2 out of 1

Der The former environmental analysis division was spun off into a separate company, AGROLAB Agrar- und Umwelt GmbH. From Kiel, it is to further develop the entire northern European economic area with its range of analyses in the areas of water, wastewater, sewage sludge and contaminated sites. In turn, the new company was able to move into adjacent, existing halls on the Suchsdorf campus, thus obtaining space for the expansion of LUFA's food and feed analysis in an environmentally friendly manner. In the course of this reorganisation, the name of LUFA-ITL was also changed in 2019, and the company has since been operating under the name AGROLAB LUFA GmbH - also to give due expression to its successful affiliation with the AGROLAB GROUP.

Today, AGROLAB LUFA is one of the most modern routine laboratories and is designed for a high daily sample throughput. The institute centre has asserted itself within the laboratory group as the lead laboratory for food and feed analysis. Kiel is home to central development projects that are transferred to other European AGROLAB sites. The analytical range continues to be oriented towards the market needs of the target groups. Due to decades of experience in various special fields such as dioxin analysis, vitamin, allergen and GMO analyses, the Kiel laboratory enjoys worldwide recognition, cooperates with many other laboratories and is networked in national and international working groups for method standardisation.



AGROLAB is an Important Regional Employer

The two AGROLAB sites in Kiel have a total area of about 13,000 square metres, making them one of the largest private contract laboratories in Europe. For the economic region of Kiel and the federal state of Schleswig-Holstein, this means, among other things, 350 secure and future-oriented jobs. Since 2001, AGROLAB has been strengthening the location in northern Germany with innovative market and production strategies and making sustainable investments - also for the future. Healthy growth is expected in the coming years and therefore the recruitment of further staff at all levels is planned. Even in difficult times, such as during the Corona pandemic, AGROLAB is a safe and caring employer - even with an officially recognised, system-relevant mission.

In addition to keeping pace with technological progress, securing the future means continuously investing in the qualifications of our employees. For many years, AGROLAB Laboratories in Kiel has operated an internal training laboratory, which currently looks after almost 40 trainees in the professions of chemical laboratory technician and chemical junior technician in cooperation with the vocational school in Lübeck.

The award „Best Trainers in Germany“, which AGROLAB received for the second time in a row, confirms the company's commitment to young talent and the high quality of its training. After successful completion of their training, the young specialists are taken on by the Europe-wide AGROLAB GROUP itself and find attractive career opportunities in a growing industry.

Sources and literature:

¹ Agricultural-chemical studies, experiments and analyses with special reference to the conditions in Schleswig-Holstein.

(1895) A commemorative publication dedicated to the farmers of Schleswig-Holstein as a review of the twenty-five years of activity of the Agricultural-Chemical Experimental Station in Kiel

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