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## Prof. Dr. Birgit Kleinschmit takes office as new Thünen President

**With the professor from Braunschweig, a forest scientist with proven expertise in Earth observation is taking over the leadership of the Federal Research Institute for Rural Areas, Forests and Fisheries.**

Braunschweig (3 February 2025). The Thünen Institute has a new president: Since 1 February 2025, the Federal Research Institute for Rural Areas, Forests and Fisheries, headquartered in Braunschweig, is headed by forest scientist Prof. Dr. Birgit Kleinschmit. The Braunschweig resident previously worked for 22 years as a professor of geoinformation in environmental planning at the Technical University (TU) Berlin. "As a curious person, the interdisciplinary research and the diversity of topics at the Thünen Institute offer me an exciting opportunity to actively shape social progress," says Birgit Kleinschmit, explaining her move to the top of the departmental research institution. "The questions about sustainable land and sea use as well as the development of rural areas are complex. These can only be answered with interdisciplinary research teams. Together, the 15 specialist institutes have the necessary economic, ecological, technical and social science expertise. Among other things, extensive monitoring data regularly collected by the Thünen Institute serves as a basis," says the scientist.

For her, the greatest challenges of our time are the transformation of agricultural and food systems towards more ecological, economic and social sustainability. Coping with climate change and ending the global extinction of species are key challenges. The goal of society as a whole is to design ecologically and economically sustainable and socially acceptable land and sea uses as well as vital rural areas. "Our task is to advise politicians on this path. To this end, our scientists provide evidence-based, independent decision-making support with the help of interdisciplinary preliminary research," emphasizes Birgit Kleinschmit. In her new position as Thünen President, she sees herself as a kind of helmswoman who keeps the common course safe even in turbulent times.

### **Nature lover, family person and always curious**

Born and raised on the green outskirts of Münster, the nature lover Kleinschmit moved to the Georg-August-University of Göttingen in 1993 to study forestry. After completing her studies and doctorate on "Natural Forest Monitoring with Remote Sensing Methods", she first worked as a software developer. In 2003, at the age of 29, she was appointed to a junior professorship and in 2011 to a university professorship in the field of geoinformation at the TU Berlin.

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Birgit Kleinschmit is a sought-after expert in her field: Since 2019, she has been advising the Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture (BMEL) on the Scientific Advisory Council for Forest Policy, has been the spokesperson for several interdisciplinary research associations, is a reviewer for the German Research Foundation and the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, among others, and is a reviewer for various scientific journals. At TU Berlin, she was also Deputy Managing Director of the Institute and a member of the university's Transfer Advisory Board. She was one of the 100 most important minds in science in Berlin in 2024 and was a keynote speaker at COP27 in Egypt in 2022. She also supports young female scientists as a personal mentor.

Birgit Kleinschmit is based in Braunschweig since 2006, where she lives with her husband and two children. She comes from a large family and married into an even larger one. "I like togetherness, I'm a family person," says the 51-year-old of herself. "But I can also assert myself in a large group," she adds with a laugh. What she appreciates about Braunschweig is not only its location in the middle of a richly structured landscape of forests, fields and waters or its proximity to the Harz Mountains, where she likes to hike. "The region is an excellent science centre in the middle of Germany. That makes it worth living for a scientist like me," says Kleinschmit.

Professor Kleinschmit was appointed Thünen President in 2024 by Federal Minister of Agriculture Cem Özdemir after an appointment process. She succeeds the recently deceased agricultural economist Prof. Dr. Folkhard Isermeyer.

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