

# AGROECOLOGY

NEWSLETTER NOVEMBER 2006 VOL.1 NO.4

MASTER'S OF SCIENCE (UMB)

## WHAT IS AGROECOLOGY

*The academic field that bridges agriculture, nature and society.*

Agroecology links practice and science in describing, analyzing, and managing complex agroecosystems. We focus on integrating ecology, agriculture, socio-economics, and culture with an ultimate goal of sustaining production, food security, community and environmental health.

CURRENTLY	What is Agroecology?	1
	Experiential Education Leads to Lifelong Learning	1
	Thesis Abstract: What are contributing factors for a successful organic food system in Norway?	2
	Student Profile: Bastian Hoffmann	2



## EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION LEADS TO LIFELONG LEARNING

*C. Francis, T.A. Breland, G. Lieblein*

How do we prepare to become agroecologists and does this differ from other university programs? The agroecology MSc program is based on experiential learning, starting from the study and identification of specific problems situations in the field and ending with practical recommendations in the form of potential scenarios for creating a better future system. Two classes, farming systems and food systems, begin a student's study of agroecology. Built on both group projects and individual reflection, the class activities combine theory with practice in highly interactive projects with clients in farming and food systems. The program links experiential learning to the scientific process.

In the farming systems course, group projects on improving farming systems connect small student teams with a farm family, and future potential farming scenarios are developed based on the family's goals, resources and innovative ideas. Students work as a consulting team,

often to suggest how a farm could convert to organic production and direct sale of products to achieve optimum profits



from their work. Their relationship to the community is just as important as the production, economics, and environmental impact of future systems. The group's *client document* is submitted for evaluation, including feedback from the farm family.

In the food systems course, larger student teams are assigned one county in Norway where they meet with officials, farmers, processors, marketers, and consumers. Within the goals of these stakeholders in the food system, the team develops possible future scenarios to improve processing and sale of local food, reduce food imports when appropriate, and increase the food security of the county. Ideas from clients are combined with innovation from the student team in preparing a *client document* for the county.

Following group work and preparation of team reports, each student writes a personal *learner document* that summarizes and evaluates the learning process during each course. This is based on reflection about the group work, topics covered, and personal growth during the course. Students have found these activities useful in building confidence in their capabilities to address complexity and change in agriculture, a quality that is often not achieved when conventional courses focused only on subject matter are the major part of a graduate program.

## AGROECOLOGY MSC PROGRAM UMB

Norwegian University of Life  
Sciences (UMB)

P.O Box 5003  
N-1432 Ås  
Norway

Tel: +47 64 96 50 00  
Other: +47 64 96 56 44  
Fax: +47 64 96 50 01  
E-mail: postmottak@umb.no  
www.umb.no



MSc Agroecology  
Norwegian University  
of Life Sciences (UMB)  
www.umb.no/?viewID=2009  
Email: geir.lieblein@umb.no

### The Student Information Center

Phone: +47 64 96 61 00  
Email: opptak@umb.no/studie  
www.umb.no/studie

### Nordic School of Agroecology/ Ecological Agriculture

Phone: +47 64 96 56 44  
Email: geir.lieblein@umb.no  
www.agroasis.com



### Editor

Nicholas Willis

## WHAT ARE CONTRIBUTING FACTORS FOR A SUCCESSFUL ORGANIC FOOD SYSTEM IN NORWAY?

MSc Agroecology Thesis Spring 2006

*Bastian Hoffmann*

The Norwegian government, in 1999, set a goal of 10% of the agricultural area in organic production within 10 years, given an acceptable market. To meet this goal, action plans promoting organic agriculture were made. Due to varying local conditions regarding the production and sale of organics in Norway, the organic food system is developing in various ways across the country. The objective of this research was to identify factors for assessing the success of the organic food system's development. The principles of soft-systems methodology<sup>1</sup> were used to develop the research framework. Study areas were selected based upon suggestions from key actors in the organic food system.

Two workshops were organized with developers and actors of the organic food system. At these workshops, a successful food system was envisioned. From the collective vision, criteria for the evaluation of the food system were gathered. After these workshops, regions in the Oslo Fjord area and middle Norway were chosen for investigation. Stakeholders in the regions gave individual assessments of their views of the organic food system. The actors' individual assessments, the results from the workshops and secondary data about the organic food system were used to identify factors of successful organic food systems.

The most important factors for establishing a successful food system were clear objectives and personal experiences of the actors. Long-lasting connections to other actors and consumers in the food system influence the direction and development of the organic food system. The crucial factor for the promotion of organics is its uniqueness. Therefore the involvement of respected institutions and businesses (schools, administrations, supermarkets, etc) has a big impact on the successful establishment of organics.

<sup>1</sup>More on soft-systems methodology may be found at: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Systems\\_thinking](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Systems_thinking)

AGROECOLOGY MASTER'S OF SCIENCE (UMB)

### STUDENT PROFILE : BASTIAN HOFFMANN

M.Sc. Organic Agriculture/Agroecology  
Spring 2006

Career: Research Association Section Leader  
Started October 2006

Workplaces: Mid-Helgeland Agricultural  
Research Association & the Norwegian Institute  
for Agriculture and Environmental Research

Location: Tjøtta, Norway



Bastian, a native of Germany, works as a leader of a farmer's research association. He is in charge of grain crop research. His work also includes soil sampling, fertilizer planning/usage and information technology. In addition, he works with the Norwegian Institute for Agriculture and Environmental Research examining the bottlenecks for growth of organic agriculture in northern Norway. His experience from project work during agroecology courses at UMB were seen as very helpful for his thesis work.