AGROECOLOGY
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MASTER 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.

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Andrea Lawseth (Canada): Student Profile

Chuck Francis

Andrea Lawseth is currently an Agricultural Stewardship Coordinator with the Langley Environmental Partners Society (LEPS) in Southern British Columbia. Her main focus has been with the manure education program for small lot farmers in this community where horses and hobby farmers predominate. She helps them look after their land more sustainably, in order to manage their wastes in accordance with the provincial regulations. She does site consultations, workshops, and presentations at community meetings to spread the word about manure and pasture management. Now she is working on a *Land Management Guide for Horse Owners and Small Lot Farmers* with information about manure and pasture management, as well as watershed stewardship. The web site for this program is at www.manuremaiden.com. Andrea is working to complete a thesis on urban agriculture and food independence in the Fraser Valley. While at UMB, Andrea served as president of the International Student Association, as well as student advisor with the agroecology 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

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.org

Editor
Chuck Francis
E-mail: charf@umb.no
Kristin Pederson

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European Network of Organic Agriculture Teachers

Geir Lieblein, Chuck Francis

Courses in organic agriculture are becoming popular in many European universities, and it is important to share ideas and teaching materials. The European Network of Organic Agriculture Teachers (**ENOAT**) meets each year to provide updates on university programs and to explore emerging topics of mutual interest. This year's meeting in Pieve Tesino, Italy focused on the integration of research and teaching, already a cornerstone of our educational program in agroecology at UMB. From the first day on an organic farm in Norway, we begin a qualitative research process with farmer interviews designed to learn about their farming philosophies, goals, resources, and plans. At the same time, we pursue more quantitative questions such as number of hectares in wheat, cows being milked, or loads of vegetables taken to market. The results of this multidimensional research are evaluated and organized into a rich picture of the farm, and potential strategies or scenarios are developed and analyzed *a priori* to decide on recommendations to the farm family. Also in Italy, we examined crop/animal systems as models for integrative mixed farming and for learning, and looked at examples from several countries to see how the concepts were applied on organic farms. We are helping edit the proceedings of the workshop that should be available in December 2007 on line.

Web Portal for Organic Farming and Agroecology

Chuck Francis, Geir Lieblein

There is a growing wealth of information on organic farming and agroecology, but often the majority of what is practical and site specific is not available through conventional channels of technical journals or books. Often this information is in a local language, is specific to a few crops or rotations, and is hidden in the files of a researcher or teacher or advisor who brings this out as needed. Farmers and school teachers also have a rich personal store of materials not easily available to others. The **Organic EduNET** is a new EU-funded information project, led by a Greek university team with partners in several countries including Norway. The 3-year project is designed to collect, organize, catalog, and make available as much information as possible that will be useful to university instructors, school teachers, and others in society. The web portal will give access to lectures, powerpoints, articles, book chapters, bulletins, case studies, and other resources that can be used in education. At the same time, clients will feed their own materials into the repository to enrich the resource. There is need for quality control, for translation into multiple languages, and for enough description of the context to make the information valuable and applied. The project involves both subject matter specialists in organic farming and computer/IT specialists who will design the portal for efficient operation. Look for this portal to open for testing some time in 2008.

Tor Arvid Breland: Faculty Profile by Chuck Francis

Tor Arvid Breland is Professor in Agroecology at UMB and principal instructor for the PAE 302 course each autumn semester. He was raised on a mixed farm in southern Norway, and completed his undergraduate degree at NLH in general agriculture with specific interests in organic farming. His PhD degree in soils and later work has focused on soil microbiology and nitrogen turnover in cropping rotations and crop/animal systems. Tor Arvid has advised a number of MSc and PhD students in the area of legume nitrogen fixation, soil nitrogen dynamics, and how these impact soil fertility. He is especially excited about how the agroecology courses help students link systems theory with practice, and how the project work prepares them to face real-world challenges in organic and other resource-efficient farming systems.