

# AGROECOLOGY

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MASTER'S OF SCIENCE (UMB)

## WHAT IS AGROECOLOGY

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

Agroecology links theory and practice using social and natural sciences to describe, analyze and manage complex agroecosystems. The program focuses on integrating ecology, organic and conventional agriculture, socio-economics and culture with the ultimate goal of sustaining production, food security, community and environmental health.

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## THE ROLE OF GUEST STUDENTS IN THE AGROECOLOGY PROGRAM

**The Agroecology program** draws students from all over the world. Each autumn, the core courses *Agroecology and Farming Systems* and *Agroecology and Food Systems* are taught to a mixture of program students, who will receive a MSc. degree at UMB, and exchange students, who will return to their home institution to complete their degree. The Agroecology newsletter has traditionally featured only program students, but this month focuses on a guest student, Guido Agostinucci, who took the Agroecology courses at UMB in 2004.

By Karen Adler

**The Agroecology classes** have grown considerably in size since 1999, from early courses of around 10 to the present size of about 22 students. Yet since the beginning, the classes have maintained a balance of guests from other institutions and UMB program students. This promotes network-building among universities offering agroecology, organic and sustainable agriculture MSc. degrees. It also encourages greater collaboration and information-sharing between university professors and students interested in the same academic approaches to teaching and learning about agroecology.

**The Agroecology network:** The program has strong links in Europe to both FESIA in France and the Universities of Viterbo and Tuscia in Italy, which all offer Agroecology MSc. programs. However, it also attracts guest students from other universities. This fall, students from institutions in France, Italy, Canada, Pakistan, Malawi and Denmark have all been accepted. In the end, a mixture of about half guest and half program students is desired so that the course maintains an intercultural environment that fosters personal and professional development.



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## Student profile: Guido Agostinucci

### Associate Researcher at the Department of Ecology and Sustainable Economic Development at the University of Tuscia (Viterbo)

His work is focused on research about the artichoke (*Cynara scolymus*), a typical vegetable species grown in Mediterranean countries and especially in Italy, where it is used in traditional cuisine. He also owns an organically-managed olive farm.



## ORGANIC AGRICULTURE: AN OPPORTUNITY FOR DEVELOPING COUNTRIES? THE CASE OF THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

My MSc. thesis examined the opportunities offered to a low-income developing country by the expansion of the market for organic produce in the European Union. The export of organic bananas, coffee and cocoa from the Dominican Republic were taken as specific examples. The evolution of the EU trade policy toward these products was evaluated and the advantages of their “organic” quality was analyzed. In particular, organic products were reviewed for their competitive edge in the face of further moves toward trade liberalisation in the WTO and for the development of value-added domestic processing industries. The question of consumer confidence in certification systems was raised, being the former essential for maintaining and expanding markets for organic food. Systems currently recognised in the EU for organic imports were documented, showing that there is a high cost for certification systems presently available to developing country exporters to obtain access to European markets. The study demonstrated the close interrelationship between EU policies for trade, development assistance and organic produce and their effects on the growth of a developing country.

## A GUEST STUDENT PERSPECTIVE ON THE AGROECOLOGY PROGRAM

When I first decided to continue my studies after finishing my Bachelor’s degree, I was very interested in several areas of agricultural science. These included extremely varied topics that ranged from sustainable agriculture to economics. I was also searching for a more “international” course that could offer the opportunity to learn from and confront perspectives and experiences of people with different backgrounds. The MSc. in Agroecology allowed me to accomplish all these objectives!

Thanks to the establishment of a cooperation agreement between the University of Tuscia and the Norwegian University of Life Science (UMB), I had the opportunity to spend an autumn semester in Ås taking the Agroecology classes. It was interesting

to compare the method of teaching as well as the content and structure of the lectures with the curriculum taught in my own country. Further, the principles and experiences acquired from the courses were helpful in the arrangement and completion of my thesis work.

The MSc. in Agroecology gave me the opportunity not only to deepen my knowledge and interests in some specific areas of agricultural science, but also to carry out a thesis in a developing country through the implementation of principles, theories and experiences I acquired at UMB. Moreover, once I completed my Master’s degree, there was a wide range of potential employment opportunities.

All text Guido Agostinucci