

AGROECOLOGY DEADLINES

The application deadline for students to get guaranteed housing on exchange to UMB in agroecology is March 1.

Also, late applications to become a program student may be accepted until March 1. Contact Kristin Pederson (kristin.pederson@gmail.com) with questions.

IN THIS ISSUE

Agroecology Deadlines	1
In the Scheme of Things—Food System Learning: Hanne Torjusen, Geir Lieblein and Gunnar Vittersø	1
Miguel Altieri — Agroecologist Profile: Chuck Francis	2
The World of Exchange — SLU: Karen Adler and Kristin Pederson	2
Lennart Salomonsson — Faculty Profile: Chuck Francis	2
Supplement: Changing Minds – The story of an education program: Trine Lund and Md. Hafizur Rahman	3-4



Miguel Altieri

In the Scheme of Things: Food System Learning Hanne Torjusen, Geir Lieblein and Gunnar Vittersø

Box schemes are an increasingly popular method of securing a supply of organic and sometimes local produce. Recent research by Hanne Torjusen, Geir Lieblein and Gunnar Vittersø supports the belief that these schemes can also be used to educate people and to support the development of more sustainable food systems.

In an article to be published in the June 2008 issue of the journal *Local Environment*, participants in a survey of three organic box schemes, two in Norway and one in Denmark, indicated an increased knowledge of food, food systems, and agricultural practices since they joined. The majority of participants also valued the more personal nature of the communication and social relations found through the box schemes, which fill a void left by the efficiency and convenience-based nature of supermarket shopping. For example, each box scheme supplied subscribers with a newsletter, and this was thought to be important by 65 to 90 percent of participants in the various schemes.



Further good news found through the survey is that over 80 percent of respondents reported that they had increased the amount of fruits and vegetables in their diet. Since they received over 60 types of vegetables through the schemes, their choices were also much more diverse than average and included more of the root vegetables that can be produced locally in abundance in the Nordic region. This has positive implications in terms of the health benefits of a such dietary choices, and also for the overall sustainability of their eating, since organic and local vegetables are part of minimizing the environmental impact of eating, along with reducing meat consumption.

The results were similar across the three schemes, though the suppliers emphasized different attributes, such as local food, biodynamic food, or home delivery. This indicates commonalities among the consumer choices these schemes represent, and that such methods can be a force for change in many different counties and contexts.

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

Kristin Pederson
E-mail:
kristin.pederson@gmail.com
Chuck Francis



AGROECOLOGY MASTER OF SCIENCE (UMB)

Miguel Altieri: Agroecologist Profile

by Chuck Francis

One of the strongest and most articulate proponents of agroecology and sustainable agricultural systems is Dr. Miguel Altieri, professor at University of California, Berkeley. A native of Chile, Miguel completed his MSc thesis with CIAT and a degree with the post-graduate national university in Colombia; his PhD is in entomology from University of Florida. His book *Agroecology: The Scientific Basis of Alternative Agriculture* from the early 1980s has been reprinted and used widely. His prolific writing has included topics from pest management to design of biodiverse farms, and challenges of GMOs to problems of rural development in Latin America. Some of the books he has written include *Biodiversity and Pest Management in Agroecosystems*, *Manage Insects on Your Farm: A Guide to Ecological Strategies*, and *Agroecology: the search for a truly sustainable agriculture*. Miguel currently conducts research with students in California and Brazil, and maintains a busy writing and speaking schedule.

The World of Exchange: SLU

Karen Adler and Kristin Pederson

The Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU), with its main campus located in Uppsala, is one of the five core members of the Nordic School of Agroecology/ Ecological Agriculture. It is also a participant in the NORDPLUS and ERASMUS exchange programs, so around 300 exchange students attend the school along with 3,500 full time students and 770 postgraduate students. As in the case of LIFE, profiled last month, SLU may provide an excellent academic environment for study and thesis preparation, depending on your interests. For instance, one offering is a fall semester package combining courses in management of pests, disease and weeds in the first half and environmental issues in crop production in the second half. Other offerings, among the 250 courses taught in English throughout the university, include strategies in natural resource management project and theory courses. For more information on the agroecology-related classes offered at this and other universities within the NOVA network, see <http://www.nova-university.org/novadb/courses/subjhome.php>

Lennart Salomonsson : Faculty Profile by Chuck Francis

A key moving force in the agroecology programs in the Nordic Region is Dr. Lennart Salomonsson from the Swedish Agricultural University in Uppsala. Now in the Department of Urban and Rural Development, his research employs interdisciplinary perspectives and methods in agroecology using systems ecology theory as a base. He works closely with students on a range of topics including energy analysis of farming systems, management of self-organizing systems, and role of technology in rural development. His students have worked in a number of countries to expand their experience beyond the Swedish context. Lennart is one of the leaders of the on-line course offered by AGROASIS, a member of the regional steering committee, and a frequent instructor in agroecology and systems courses in the region. He has a MSc in agronomy, a PhD in agricultural chemistry, and is currently study director of the graduate program in his department.

Introduction to Supplement

One of the things stressed by the agroecology program is the need to translate learning into action. Below is the story of how one participant in the agroecology core courses of Farming and Food Systems is doing just that. Having received a MSc. in Management of Natural Resources and Sustainable Agriculture (MNRSA) from NORAGRIC, Trine Lund is now working to implement her education by assisting fellow MNRSA graduate, Hafizur Rahman, in his community education program. Community is at the heart of social, economic, and environmental sustainability, and education is at the heart of making good decisions for the future. We would love to publish other stories from agroecologists in different parts of the world about how they are working to "make change" either for themselves or for those around them. Such stories are inspirational, and offer an excellent opportunity for our own community to learn from one another. Comments on the following story are also welcomed by the participants.



Changing minds: The story of a development education program

By Trine Lund and Md. Hafizur Rahman

"There is a question I have wanted to ask you for long time" said a friend.

"How should development in Africa, Asia and Latin America be done? Is there a "right" way to do development?"

Development is more than achieving the targeted numbers and percentages. So, instead of explaining theories from my university studies I told my friend about an education program called Education for Deprived Students (EDS) in Bangladesh. By telling you the same story I want you to think about what development means and how it can change the way the people, who improve their own situation, look upon themselves.

"Education for deprived students" is run in a small slum area in Moheswarpasha village, Khulna, the third largest city in Bangladesh. In this area most poor parents work long days outside the home and do not have time to look after their children. The parents do not see why they should spend money for their children's education and children are sent to the market to beg or they work to get income for the household. Hafizur Rahman grew up close to a slum area in Moheswarpasha village. Because of his passion for learning, he completed a master degree in Bangladesh, got a scholarship (NORAD) to a master program at UMB and is now doing a PhD at UMB. As a teenager, Hafiz felt bad when seeing the slum children deprived of their right to education, and he started to teach some of them when he was 15 years old. Neighbors and family asked why Hafiz bothered to spend time with the slum children, what did he gain by doing it?

When I heard how Hafiz was motivating the slum children to study and how he made their parents aware about the importance of education I was thinking *"This is how development should be done"*. Growing up in Norway I have received a good education and I had the chance to travel and learn foreign languages... things that only a small percentage of the world's population can enjoy. I want to use my experiences and good fortune to enable other people to acquire what I have taken for granted... the ability to read and write, to enjoy opportunities to see other parts of the world and to learn from other cultures and broaden their perspectives. I wanted to join Hafiz's education program and learn more. We named the education program Education for Deprived Students (EDS) and currently more than 70 children and youth are participating. Since many of the children did not attend school because their parents did not encourage or enable them to study, we focus on both the children and their parents. To motivate the parents, we discuss the importance of education with them and offer to pay the educational expenses for the poorest families. The conditions are that the parents have to send their children to school and to encourage and enable their children to study properly.

In the regular schools the teachers sometime beat the children to make them study. EDS does not use such methods and does not allow the children's parents to beat them. Instead we use study groups, cultural and sport arrangements and competitions to awake the children's interest in learning. The older children teach the younger, and each month the pupil with the best



development and her or his “teacher” will receive a gift (pencil or paper, etc). This encourages the older pupils to teach well so the younger ones will learn as much as possible, and ensures the younger students are eager to study. Games are arranged every day and through these the children learn teamwork and to respect others regardless of religion, gender and social status. The children are educated to be responsible citizens and not to allow corruption or theft. If children violate the rules of the program, such as by not attending school or misbehaving, they are not allowed to join the sports and movie nights. In the beginning the children fought with each other, but now they follow the rules because they do not want to miss anything.

Groups of children and youth in the program study together each evening and this is a requirement to be allowed to participate in the sport and cultural activities and to receive economic support from the program. In this way they do not have time to hang around in the streets and disturb people. Inhabitants of Moheswarpasha village are grateful for how the children and youth in their area have improved their behaviour. Almost all the children are participating 100 percent in the study groups and during the last school examination all the children in the program had improved their grades. These good results are largely due to Mohammad Alamin, Hafiz’s nephew, who spends most of his time with the children, managing the education program.

To achieve good results in school can have very positive consequences for the children. One girl in the sixth grade had never passed an exam. Her parents and teacher thought she did not study well and were beating her regularly. The girl was 13 years old and her parent wanted to marry her away as they thought she was not able to learn anything. When she came to the education program we realized that the girl was illiterate, but nobody had bothered to find this out before. She started to study in the education program and at the next school exams she passed all subjects. Her surprised father said that “*Now I see that she is able to study, I will not marry her away. I will pay all educational expenses as long as she will need it*”.

Children are influenced by those they perceive as role models and an achievement of the education program is that the children see the value of education. Hafiz spends time with and listens to the children so they trust him. He may be the first person from his area to study for a PhD and this is a great inspiration for the children. The children even joke that they wish to receive a better education than Hafiz when they grow up. He is the best proof for them to show that it is possible to improve one’s position in life.

After the cyclone Sidor swept away houses and assets of the coastal population in Bangladesh last autumn, Education for Deprived Students decided to start a branch in one of the coastal areas called Bagherat (Rampal). Yamin Kabir, a member of EDS is from a poor family in Rampal, Bagherat, but he managed to complete his education and get a job at the University in Khulna as Assistant Professor. People in Rampal respect him for his hard work and honesty and he will therefore be a good person to lead the education program in Rampal, Bagherat.



For me, it has been an eye opener to experience how the people in Khulna have changed their thinking and become concerned about their children’s education, and how the whole community is talking about Education for Deprived Students and want their children to participate. The children prove that although they are from poor families, they may improve their own lives. I think development is closely connected to a change of the involved people’s minds. By exposing ourselves to new people and new situations we can learn and improve our thinking and actions. The program is based on volunteerism and shows how one person’s effort to give his neighbors education has developed to influence a whole village’s way of thinking.



If any of you are interested to know more about the program Education for Deprived Students, if you want to share experiences from other places or have suggestions how we can improve, please don’t hesitate to contact us at lund_trine@yahoo.no or hafiz774@yahoo.com .