

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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Using Agroecology Tools on a French Farm

by Morgane Cadario

The Tardieu's farm, called Le Clos de L'orme, is situated in the southeast of France, in a beautiful place in the middle of mountains where you can smell lavender in summer and hear the bells of sheep while contemplating mountains. One hundred fifty goats produce milk (to make a wonderful cheese, the Picodon!), and 430 sheep produce lambs on 150 ha of land, of which 110 are pastured and used for the production of firewood. Hay is dried by a solar dryer. Three hundred and thirty square meters of solar panels will be built in the next weeks to produce electricity for the farm and for sale.



Learning about the life of sheep

The Tardieu's family is very welcoming, and they feel it is a very important thing for them to share! Then they decided to develop yet another idea, which led to my internship: a green care project.

Seven themes will be emphasised on the farm: organic agriculture, goat breeding, sheep breeding, renewable energy with sustainable development, wild animals and plants, forestry and the production of wood (maintenance of the forest) and the history of the region (buildings, old machines...). I am in charge of imagining and organizing the visits around these themes.

In the beginning, a mountain was in front of me! How should I begin ...? Diverging! A piece of paper, a lot of different colors, memories of agroecology and I was in! The wall in front of me has become full of colors: mind maps about the farm and the different themes to develop, the tree metaphor, ideas from me, from farmers, from people coming here to visit us, from other farms, from teachers I have met ... ideas about games, about ways to build them, about interesting information, ... my internship began with this brain storming. Then I had to concentrate on the information that children of different ages should learn, and how to communicate the different themes and ideas.

In the area, an event called "de Ferme en Ferme" (from farms to farms) is organized each year (on 6th and 27th of April) to help people know the "farming world". Two thousand people visited the



Wall of agroecology tools

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farm to discover Clos de L'orme and its new activities for children. Stress stress!! My tasks during the weekend included a small area for baby goats and baby sheep, a "mystery box" where people could feel different things without seeing them (grain, wool, wood, etc) and a game about the life of sheep where children had to put drawings from the life of sheep on a big arrow representing a year: Participatory learning !! (Thanks to Chuck, Geir and Tor Arvid !)



This farm produces 10 ideas in a minute and a lot of them are realized. One of the secrets is that Edmond Tardieu thinks that he always needs to learn from outside, and he trusts in a lot of people and builds the projects with them. The farm seems to be in the middle of nowhere but it has so many connections with "outside"! My experience in the agroecology classes has helped me make the most of this internship, and gave me important tools to contribute to the projects here.



On the left: The "Mystery Box" and a mindmap of the sheep theme

Agroecology Career Paths : Jon Magne Holme

The Agroecology programme I attended at UMB (at that time NLH) in 2000 has been a good steppingstone for me into the world of organic agriculture. After graduating in 2002 with a pretty agronomic thesis on phosphorus uptake in cereals in relation to root hairs, I worked as an intern for half a year on a low salary at IFOAM's head office in Germany. The stay was rewarding, however, in terms of helping me build a network, from which I still benefit.

In 2003, I was called to go to Sri Lanka through the Norwegian Fredskorpset to work with a local NGO on social mobilization of marginalized estate Tamils and rural Sinhalese in Uva Province. Organic agriculture has always been part of this NGO's agenda. During my year on this tropical island I worked to document an agroforestry practice called analogue forestry. It is a promising technology, which, as with most truly sustainable agriculture methods, requires skills and knowledge of the local conditions in terms of soil, weather, trees and plants, and local culture. But, when successful, analogue forestry can make substantial positive impacts on family food security and stability, local biodiversity and food, feed and cash crop production. An important lesson from my stay at Sri Lanka is that true development comes from within, and cannot be forced upon people.

After having arrived back in Norway pretty confused - it's worse to return than to go out! - I was unemployed for a couple of months before a new opportunity opened up. In August 2004 I got a temporary position at Bioforsk (at that time NORSØK - Norwegian Centre for Ecological Agriculture) and the position was extended two times before I got a permanent position in 2005. Here I worked on N-cycling, cereals, organic agriculture and food security, soil carbon sequestration, and publishing articles on the internet. Recently, in February this year, I moved to Oslo and a new position in Oikos, the Norwegian association for organic agriculture, where I am responsible for organic agriculture policy - a pretty broad position - with more than enough challenging and interesting things to pursue.

If I could try to say something to current students, I would say: If you really want to get somewhere and go for it, you will get there, though maybe not in the way you imagined at the start. The way constantly unfolds itself as you go along. Good luck with your lifelong study!

