

# AGROECOLOGY

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MASTER'S OF SCIENCE (UMB)

## WHAT IS AGROECOLOGY

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

Agroecology is the field that 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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## MORE THAN RAIN:

IDENTIFYING SUSTAINABLE PATHWAYS FOR CLIMATE ADAPTATION AND POVERTY REDUCTION

By Karen Adler

The Development Fund, a Norwegian nonprofit organization, sponsored a free seminar on September 9th to present a comprehensive study focused on sustainable adaptations to climate change by the rural poor. The report identifies adaptive capacity mechanisms used by farmers in the context of improving food security in the specific case study sites of Ethiopia, Nicaragua and Nepal. The project, titled "More than Rain", is a collaborative effort with local partners in the three case study countries and the Global Environmental Change and Human Security project (GECHS) at the University of Oslo.

The report addresses how development organizations should design, evaluate and participate in poverty reduction projects where climate change antagonizes development. It advocates a holistic approach that systemically considers the causes of vulnerability and barriers to adaptation. The research incorporates the Intergovernmental Panel for Climate Change (IPCC) findings that there are context-specific social, financial, cultural, psychological and physiological barriers to adaptation, and that the complexity of these forces slows the adaptive capacity of the poor. Further, acclimation is tied to political and economic systems at local, national and global scales that impact the vulnerability and resilience of people in the face of climate fluctuations. The case studies are used to elucidate the relationships between specific, localized situations where rural farmers are adjusting to climate change and the factors that impact their adaptive capacity. This requires understanding broader issues like access to resources, power, information, education, technology, social networks and insurance.

Some of the agriculturally-related activities used to adapt to climate fluctuations by farmers in the case study sites include participatory plant breeding, organic agriculture, water harvesting, planting trees on farms, diversifying livestock and cropping systems, establishing cooperatives and encouraging local, farmer-initiated innovations.

The report concludes that research projects should be designed to support locally adapted solutions that address the specific problems of the region and people. There is also a need to design projects that include vulnerability assessments and climate acclimation measures as part of a larger development goal like enhancing food security. This ensures that the issue is addressed within the greater social, economic and political contexts in which it is embedded.

The report is available at <http://www.utviklingsfondet.no/filestore/MoreThanRainwebsitesize.pdf>

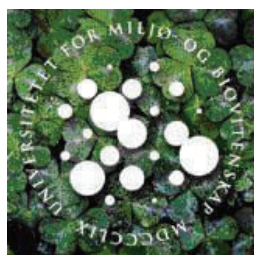
For more information about the Development Fund's activities, check out <http://www.utviklingsfondet.no/>. Information about the organization, their projects and future seminars can be found on the website.

## 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



### The Student Information Center

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

### Nordic School of Agroecology/ Ecological Agriculture

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

### Editors

Karen Adler and Charles Francis  
karen.adler@umb.no  
charles.francis@umb.no



## ENOAT Meeting Explores Key Issues in Teaching Organic Farming

ENOAT, the European Network of Organic Agriculture Teachers, is a community of university teachers with the goals to coordinate university-level courses on organic production, processing and marketing, and to facilitate the exchange of students and teachers interested in organic agriculture within Europe.

European  
Network of  
Organic  
Agriculture  
Teachers



Teachers  
Students  
Farmers  
Institutions

AGROECOLOGY MASTER'S OF SCIENCE (UMB)

By Chuck Francis, Geir Lieblein, Aage Steen Holm

A meeting in early September in Nitra, Slovakia brought together university teachers to identify important emerging issues in organic farming and agroecology. We found that electronic information resources for teaching, experiential learning, and local versus global food systems were priority topics in teaching. An in-depth discussion was organized around each of the issues. The group found increasing dependence on web-based information resources and innovative e-learning options, and agreed that more rapid exchange of information would be highly valuable among instructors. The ongoing Organic Edunet project funded by EU and coordinated by GRNET in Greece will provide an electronic repository for teaching materials and methods that will be available to school teachers and university instructors (see AE newsletter volume 2, number 8, December 2007). Experiential learning is a growing component of teaching in organic farming, with students conducting group projects in cooperation with farmers, as well as food systems projects in cooperation with local counties and multiple stakeholders. Although proven highly valuable for learning, some project-driven courses are expensive to conduct and time-consuming to organize. Local food systems are gaining momentum as consumers seek quality food from farmers nearby. Farmers markets, community supported agriculture (CSA), You-Pick, farm stands, and direct sales to restaurants are all potential niches based on local farmers providing local clients with quality foods. In part this is a reaction to concerns about a rapidly globalizing food system dominated by multinational corporations, and it is a challenge to explore these two options in courses where it is important to present advantages and disadvantages of each system in an objective way. We anticipate printed proceedings from the ENOAT workshop in the coming months.

### Faculty Profile: Dr. Vibeke Langer, KU

By Chuck Francis

Teaching in organic farming, sustainable agriculture, and food systems plus research on diversified farming systems are the favorite activities of Vibeke Langer of the Faculty of Life Sciences (LIFE) at København University in Denmark. A long-time faculty member at KVL and active participant in the planning of the Nordic network AGROASIS, Vibeke has been a key advocate for organic farming in the university system in Denmark and promoter of regional collaboration in teaching and research. Her own courses at KU include Farming Systems: Production and Sustainability, Organic Agriculture, Organic Food Systems, and a course in Danish on Natural Resources and Ecology. Vibeke's research includes insect-crop interactions, conversion from conventional to organic production systems, and use of legumes in Danish rotational farming systems. With colleagues in Denmark, she has also studied the regionalisation of organic farming, use of case studies in education, and farm-based rural development. Dr. Langer is also active in the European Network of Organic Agriculture Teachers (ENOAT).