

AGROECOLOGY

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MASTER'S OF SCIENCE (UMB)

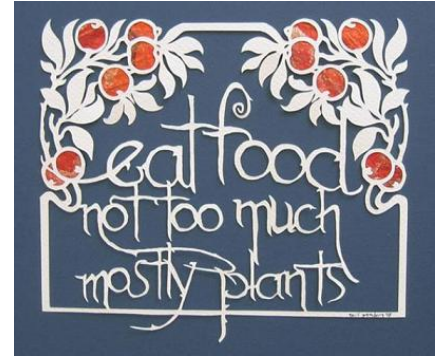
WHAT IS AGROECOLOGY

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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ECOLOGY OF FARMING AND FOOD SYSTEMS AND MICHAEL POLLAN

January's newsletter is a conglomeration of pieces on PAE 301, the internet-based course organized by the Agroecology department each spring, a philosophical treatise on how and why we should eat thoughtfully and a political message to the President of the United States on the importance of food issues to the nation and the world. The latter two articles are based on the work of Michael Pollan, an influential writer and activist for sustainable farming and food systems. We hope you will enjoy, and as always, we welcome your stories and submissions.

INTERNET COURSE IN AGROECOLOGY

By Karen Adler

Many people don't realize that there is a third course offered by the Agroecology department. Every spring, Ecology of Farming and Food Systems, PAE301, is offered for students interested in studying agroecology. The course is based on a case study of a Danish organic farm. It deals with the structure and functioning of agroecosystems as whole entities seen from different perspectives. Examples are ecological, economic, social and organizational levels and time and spatial scales. Using the case, students have the opportunity to explore the structure and functioning of agroecosystems, multi-functional agriculture, ecosystem services and systems thinking in addition to examining the more conventional production and economic aspects of the farm. The connection between the farm and the greater food system is scrutinized through its links with processors such as bakeries and slaughterhouses, and with consumers through the on-farm shop.

Every week, a different faculty member from the NOVA network leads the interactive, internet-based course. The class, which is taught in English, runs for eight weeks starting in early February. The curriculum draws students from a number of universities at both the Bachelor and Master levels. For more information, contact opptak@umb.no or see the UMB website: <http://www.umb.no/search/courses/pae301> for a detailed course description.



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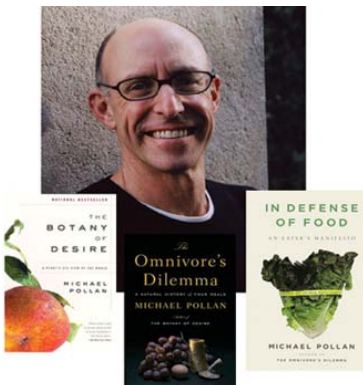
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MICHAEL POLLAN, AUTHOR AND ACTIVIST

By Chuck Francis

In agroecology studies, our role models and valuable information resources often come from outside the traditional fields of agriculture and horticulture. Michael Pollan is a popular author who writes about agriculture, food systems and their relationship with preserving natural resources and the environment. His books have an integrative quality and easy accessibility that have made him one of the most widely read contemporary authors today. *Second Nature* (1991) traces the garden through four seasons. It is written in a compelling and exciting way that weaves the plant, animal, and soil life together in a “web of life”. In *The Botany of Desire* (2002) Pollan describes in human terms why the apple is sweet, the tulip was selected for its beauty, marijuana intoxicates, and perfect potatoes are developed through transgenic technologies to meet our desire for “perfection”. *The Omnivore's Dilemma: a Natural History of Four Meals* (2007) is a creative look at how food is produced, as Pollan personally traces the components of meals from seed to harvest, through feedlot and processing, and finally to the plate. As a summary of what he has learned, Pollan grows some foods, hunts for meat, and in

the last chapter describes how he prepared a meal that includes ingredients he has raised or acquired locally, to the delight of chefs and friends who helped him along the journey. Most recently, *In Defense of Food: An Eater's Manifesto* (2008) describes the current food system and what is in our foods. He suggests that we ask our grandmothers and great-grandmothers, if possible, what they ate for the best guidelines of what is really good for us. Avoid any packaged food with more than five ingredients, and as summarized up front in the book, he recommends that we eat with these ideas in mind: **Eat food. Not too much. Mostly plants.** An English professor at the University of California at Berkeley, Michael Pollan is perhaps the most influential writer today in terms of impacting the future of the U.S. citizen's diet. He is also an activist for agroecological principles, as shown in his letter to the new U.S. president, which is discussed below.



A LETTER TO THE PRESIDENT: FARMER IN CHIEF

From Michael Pollan, summarized by Chuck Francis

Before the 2008 U.S. elections decided the presidency, author Michael Pollan wrote a message to the new president. In this October letter published in the New York Times, Pollan raises the profile of agriculture and food to a level he feels is essential – even in the face of the current crises in economics, fossil fuels, and military confrontations that capture most of the headlines. He points out that food policy is low on the agenda because most people in the U.S. have never experienced food shortage or hunger. Pollan broadens the argument to relate healthy diets and adequate food for all as essential to solving other crises that attract more attention: resolving the health care dilemma, producing food in the face of fossil fuel shortfalls, and improving education. The industrial food system uses 19% of U.S. fossil fuels, second only to cars, and produces as much as 37% of greenhouse gases. In 1940, one calorie of fossil fuels used in agriculture produced 2.3 calories of food; today it takes 10 calories of fuel to produce one calorie of food. He recommends an agriculture and food policy that promotes efficiency, shifts toward more biodiversity, increases legumes and crop/animal systems on the landscape, and rewards systems that grow food closer to home. Specifically, he suggests: 1) resolarizing the U.S. farm to depend on current sunlight, 2) regionalizing food production, growing closer to home, 3) encouraging local and direct marketing, 4) establishing a strategic grain reserve, and 5) rebuilding the U.S. food culture away from fast food toward a more healthy diet. This letter is an example of Pollan's activism, and how he combines his work in academics with solid contributions to changing the world for the better.

You can read Pollan's original letter at: <http://www.michaelpollan.com/article.php?id=97>