



Eco Studies

Academic education on organic food and farming in Finland

The University of Helsinki offers basic and intermediate studies in organic food and farming in Ruralia Institute, its Mikkeli-based independent institute for rural research, teaching and development activities. The study programme for organic food and farming is known as the Eco Studies and it's the only one of its kind in Finland.



The Eco Studies is the only possibility to study organic production within a wider course entity at the academic level. The students come mainly from the University of Helsinki from the Faculty for Agriculture and Forestry, but there are students from other Finnish universities and fields of science as well. The studies in organic food and farming are also offered through the "Open University".

Covering the whole food chain

The course selection is planned to provide the students with a multidisciplinary and many-sided picture of organic food and farming so that the whole food chain is covered. The Eco Studies offers ten basic study courses yearly and six intermediate study courses every second year from which students can choose according to their own interests. The basic study courses concentrate on the ecological principles and sustainability of organic production, basics in the organic plant production and animal husbandry, food systems, manufacturing of organic foodstuffs and the social, economic and

marketing aspects of organic production. The intermediate courses go deeper in the food systems thinking, organic quality issues and research. Also two new advanced study courses are offered, one in animal husbandry and one in organic plant production.

New pedagogical approaches

A lot of effort has been put in developing the net-based courses and at the moment three courses are entirely carried out on the Internet. This means developing both new pedagogical approaches as well as study material, for example lectures and discussions on the Internet. As there has been a lot of cooperation with local organic farms and enterprises during the traditional lecture courses, these farm and enterprise visits have partly been turned into virtual visits. By transferring part of the studies into the net the organic food and farming studies are made available for a wider group of students as the placement of the studies in the Mikkeli campus (about 230 km north-east of Helsinki) has somewhat restricted the possibilities of all interested students to participate.

Yet the real-life visits and possibilities for practical training remain in the programme as essential ways of learning. In all the teaching progressive inquiry- and problem-based learning methods are applied, utilising student-oriented and multidisciplinary team work.

The study programme prepares the students to work particularly in jobs related to the food chain and its support activities where knowledge of organic farming and food industry is required.

International possibilities

The Eco Studies programme is involved in international cooperation as well, most closely with the Nordic AGRO-ASIS network and the European ENOAT network. At the Nordic level there is an attempt to coordinate the studies so that they would complement each other both time- and subject- wise. Four lecture courses in the Eco Studies programme are entirely carried out in English and it's also possible to do the literature examinations as well as practical training courses in English.

Need for secure funding

In addition to developing the teaching and the course selection all the time to more purposeful direction, the biggest challenge in the future is to secure the position and the funding for the Eco Studies programme. The project-based funding has so far come from the European Social Funds. ■

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