

Sriskandarajah, N., Mulley, R., Christie, M., Taji, A., Wals, A., Abbott, L., von Fragstein und Niemsdorff, P., Williams, R., Langer, V., Olsen, H., Parvez, Q., Ward, P., Packham, R., Scullion, J., Daniel, H., Kristiansen, P. and Galea, V. 2005. Learning through exchange about organic agriculture - case of Europe and Australia. In: IFOAM (ed.) *Shaping Sustainable Systems. Proceedings of the 15th IFOAM Organic World Congress 20-23 September 2005, Adelaide Australia*. IFOAM (International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements), Bonn.

KW: organic; learning; teaching; university; Europe; Australia; education

Abst: LEAFSE is the catch word for an innovative program of exchange study for young Australians and Europeans, with organic agriculture as the focal point of their Masters level studies. Two years ago, the European Commission and the Australian Department of Education, Science and Technology (DEST) came up with the call for applications for a pilot project to support international mobility of tertiary students between the two continents. The grand aims set for the exchange included providing students with an international outlook and a range of perspectives, preparing them for the global marketplace, enable their understanding and empathy for different cultures and traditions and foster exchange of information. A number of us with an interest and an already existing academic network in organic agriculture proposed LEAFSE - Learning through Exchange - Agriculture, Food Systems and Environment, a winning project, which was chosen as the single pilot project from a field of well over a dozen contenders. Within the broader theme of Agriculture, Food Systems and Environment, we named organic farming as the focal point of the exchange, and we were aware of the immense possibilities for learning through exchange inter-continentially in this field.

Under this project, Master's level students from EU study for a semester at a partner university in Australia, and students from Australia study for a semester at a partner university in EU. The partners in the programme are,
from Europe:

- The Royal Veterinary and Agricultural University, Denmark
- University of Wales, Aberystwyth, United Kingdom
- Wageningen University and Research Centre, The Netherlands
- University of Kassel, Witzenhausen, Germany, and

from Australia:

- University of Western Sydney, New South Wales
- University of New England, New South Wales
- University of Western Australia, Western Australia
- University of Queensland, Queensland

The project has an innovative but manageable framework for mobility of the students, a joint programme of study which incorporates many novel elements including holistic thinking, experiential and integrated learning and use of newer tools of communication technologies, and above all, a structure that fosters a high degree of inter-cultural understanding and network building. When completed, the pilot phase of the project would have enabled exchange of 36 students from each continent, nine from each participating institution. The respective government agencies provide the students with an adequate stipend to cover travel and living expenses for six months of study.

The project has been running on target and the results of the first year of exchange have been more than impressive. This presentation will be a joint effort by the faculty and a number of participating students to demonstrate the cultural, agricultural, pedagogic, and practical lessons that have been learnt from this exchange in the field of organic farming. It will also highlight some of the challenges which need to be overcome in our efforts towards shaping sustainable agricultural and food systems which are cognizant of our respective environments.