Sustainable Agriculture and Food Systems Aotearoa

A new and exciting semester program in Aotearoa New Zealand

Spring 2020: February 10–May 20 | Fall 2020: September 7–December 16

Aotearoa New Zealand is a world leader in primary production—the agricultural sector (including pastoral farming, horticulture, fishing, forestry) is the backbone of the economy. A wide range of New Zealand produce is exported around the globe, including dairy, honey, eggs, meat, wool, wine, fruit, vegetables, seafood and timber. New Zealand has a strong focus on forward thinking to meet the increased pressures on its natural capital. The need for environmental accountability, high-quality, high-value and diverse products has created a broad range of educational and research opportunities.

Agroecology, sustainable land use, and systems thinking underpin the pathways to resilient food systems. Water quality, maintenance of biodiversity, and reducing emissions are key focus areas for innovation and development. Indigenous knowledge and food sovereignty are integral parts of long-term viable food production and supply. The Māori agribusiness sector is distinctive and offers unique insights and opportunities for collaborative models. Integrating people, communities, and values with primary production systems can ultimately result in rich and multi-cultural approaches to food systems.

Join our vibrant, sustainable learning community in Aotearoa New Zealand. Learn through case-studies, lectures, workshops, and on-farm experiences. You will enjoy the supportive, multi-dimensional, and academically rigorous environment. Haere Mai! Welcome!
15 weeks, 4 courses, 16 credits

We provide an exciting mix of academic rigour, place-based and hands-on learning. This gives students great opportunities to engage with a variety of agribusinesses in New Zealand.

The goals of this program include enabling students to gain an in-depth understanding of:

> Global trends in agricultural sustainability and sustainable land management, and the challenges and manifestations of these trends in Aotearoa New Zealand.

> Political, economic and cultural models of agriculture.

> Situating agriculture in an ecosystems framework. Aligning land use with land use capability and landscape resilience in a manner compatible with existing and future ecological, social, cultural, economic, and political contexts.

> A systems approach to socially and culturally durable, economically viable, and politically expedient pathways to enable a transition toward agricultural sustainability and ecological resilience at scale.

We aim to empower students with experience and tools, as well as professional and life skills to engage with sustainable food systems and to be pro-active, solution-focused practitioners.

The program is delivered in the top half of Te Waipounamu the South Island of New Zealand. Students live and travel together with faculty and staff. We have a home base in Golden Bay for half the semester, and we are away for a number of weeks on extended field trips. Accommodation will typically be in cabins, shared between 2–4 students.

Each week has a theme closely related to the particular land-use and agriculture practices of the places we stay. Field visits and the associated learning opportunities focus on topical, real-time case studies in a variety of production systems (including a variety of cropping systems) and agribusiness. Lectures, tutorials, discussions, peer-teaching, assignments and project work are all part of the program.

To gain practical skills and experiences, and to increase competency in farm and food systems related work, students will be on farm/agribusiness placements for a total of 20 working days (two placements of 10 days each) as part of the ‘Agricultural production and business practice’ course. Students will be at these placements with several peers, accompanied by staff and farm placement hosts. During these farm placements, faculty will visit all teams and be available to students.
SAFS670 Systems Thinking: Land Use Capability and Sustainability
This course establishes a conceptual framework (lens) in systems thinking to critically examine New Zealand and global examples of the challenges that have arisen from the mismatch between land use and land use capability. Students investigate downstream effects of the rural-urban divide (food-justice), on people, health, services and the environment. Food security, ethical foods, as well as the influence of climate change on food supply and the viability of agribusiness are included.

SAFS671 Agroecology and Sustainable Land Management
Agroecology is a way of thinking and acting. Using this lens, students investigate the interface of agriculture and the natural environment. Through first-hand experiences with agribusiness, students explore enduring solutions for sustainable food systems. The emphasis will be on dimensions of agroecology that are relevant in a framework of sustainable land management; and on gaining confidence in evaluating processes and science associated with the biological and physical process in agroecosystems.

SAFS672 Pathways to Sustainable Agriculture and Food Systems
This course empowers students to pursue knowledge and understanding of food systems around the interface of policy, practice, and science to build pathways toward technically robust, economically sound and viable solutions which enable transformation in the rural landscape. Topics include value systems, socio-cultural benefits of re-thinking food systems at scale, carbon-forestry, carbon offsets, nutrient cap-and-trade models, (Integrated) Catchment Management and Climate Smart Agriculture. Critical thinking, and risk assessment tools are integral components.

SAFS673 Agricultural Production and Business Practice
In this experiential course students will spend time in farm or agribusiness placements. Practical, hands-on experience of the workings of agribusiness provides students with opportunities to enhance their autonomy and capacity as active learners. Students will gain transferable skills, increase competency and develop a comprehensive understanding of sustainability initiatives and practices of food systems. Students can transfer insights from classroom work to a practical setting and bring previously developed skills to a new context.

All courses carry 4 semester hour credits.

“The Sustainable Agriculture and Food Systems Aoetearoa program looks to build on an incredible history of EcoQuest developing change agents for a better environmental future by digging in deep with agriculture. I can only imagine the leaders that will emerge from this experience and expect to see them shaping their communities for the better.”
Alex Bryan, BA University of Michigan; EcoQuest ’07; University of Michigan Sustainable Food Program Manager; Co-Owner of Detroit’s Food Field; Founding Board Member National Young Farmers Coalition; Former Director of Agricultural Programs, Greater Lansing Food Bank
Prerequisites

Successful completion of at least 36 semester credit hours (or equivalent) of college or university studies, including at least one semester course related to agriculture production and management (such as Sustainable Agriculture, Horticulture, Animal Science, Agroecology, or equivalent courses), and at least one related to Agricultural Business, Environmental Economics, or Food and Society.

A moderately high degree of physical fitness, including the ability to work outside for extended periods in all weather.

Agreement with the fundamental principles of intensive study, group cooperation, sustainability ethics, and personal responsibility that are central to the EcoQuest living and learning environment.

Admission

Applicants are required to:

1. Complete the Application for Admissions Process: https://ecoquest.unh.edu/admissions. There is a non-refundable US $35.00 application fee.

2. Provide an official up-to-date college transcript documenting successful completion of 36 semester credit hours (see prerequisites above).

3. Provide two references: one academic reference from a professor or instructor, and one character reference from a person (other than a peer, family member or acquaintance) who can comment on your suitability for the EcoQuest-UNH SAFSA residential and learning environment.

The EcoQuest-UNH Admissions Committee will evaluate all applications within three weeks of receipt of the required documents and invite you for a personal or phone interview.

For inquiries, please contact:
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