

## Media Relations

# New Sustainable Agriculture Program Shapes Future Of Food

February 9, 2011



DURHAM, N.H. – The University of New Hampshire has launched a new major that reflects the region’s agricultural landscape and the growing appetite for local, sustainable food, products and services. The major, Sustainable Agriculture and Food Systems, combines plant, animal, and environmental sciences with related topics such as nutrition, forestry, aquaculture, and business disciplines such as entrepreneurship and marketing. With a high degree of flexibility to address students’ unique goals and needs, the major offers both Bachelor of Science and Bachelor of Arts degrees.

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University of New Hampshire students in the Organic Garden Club operate a weekly farm stand on campus. Credit: UNH Photographic Services

“This new major is consistent with the convictions we see in our young adults toward sustainable use of resources, knowing where their food and other products come from and how they are produced, and a desire to participate in this most fundamental aspect of life rather than being a passive consumer and bystander,” says Jon Wraith, associate dean of agriculture in UNH’s College of Life Sciences and Agriculture and co-director of the New Hampshire Agricultural Experiment

Station at UNH. “This major aims to prepare students for employment related to New England’s diversified and relatively small-size agricultural operations, as well as to provide them with the knowledge and experiences to pursue other careers or advanced education.”

Becky Sideman, associate professor of sustainable horticulture and coordinator for the major, notes that books such as “The Omnivore’s Dilemma” and “Animal, Vegetable, Miracle” and the growth in farmer’s markets and other local food sources may have fueled students’ interest in sustainable agriculture. Over the past five years, enrollment in her Sustainable and Organic Food Production course has more than doubled.

“Most of these students not from farm backgrounds, but they are genuinely interested in food production,” she says.

The new major, which began in Fall 2010 with 15 students, requires students to complete foundation courses that explore a range of topics underpinning sustainable agriculture and to declare an area of emphasis that focuses their particular interest, from agricultural education to horticulture to food systems. The major requires at least one experiential course as well as a capstone experience, which Sideman says will likely involve students working alongside faculty members in the lab or on the farm.

Experiential courses might include CREAM – Cooperative Real Experience in Agriculture Management – in which students operate and manage a small Holstein herd on campus, or other similar courses under development in diversified organic agro-ecosystem and vegetable crop and horticulture management. Students also will be encouraged to develop internships with agricultural businesses within the state.

The Sustainable Agriculture and Food Systems major will take advantage of UNH’s expansive experiment station facilities: the Fairchild Dairy Teaching and Research Center, the Organic Dairy Research Farm, the Kingman and Woodman Horticultural Farms and the MacFarlane Greenhouses.

Wraith notes that the new major, which complements UNH’s unique EcoGastronomy double major by

providing an outstanding "primary" major for interested students, will fill a need in New England's diversified agricultural landscape.

"Students have told us that their family's operation includes some livestock, horticultural crops, and a forested woodlot. This crosses at least three traditional degree programs, but we can now effectively integrate these common aspects of New England agriculture," he says. "Further, we're repeatedly told by key partners that entrepreneurship, economics, marketing, and human resources management are critical aspects of the real world that are often not well covered in traditional degree programs." As opportunities in local agriculture, farmer's markets, and agri-tourism "skyrocket," he says, this program aims to prepare students for meaningful careers.

"The new SAFS major represents one key aspect of the ongoing reinvigoration of our agriculture and food systems programs here at UNH. We're fortunate to be working in a time of greatly renewed interest in agriculture and food, and that's also reflected here on campus. We want to partner with multiple constituents and disciplines to help lead the way forward," says Wraith.

For more information, go to <http://sustainableag.unh.edu/>.

The University of New Hampshire, founded in 1866, is a world-class public research university with the feel of a New England liberal arts college. A land, sea, and space-grant university, UNH is the state's flagship public institution, enrolling 12,200 undergraduate and 2,300 graduate students.

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[http://unh.edu/news/cj\\_nr/2011/feb/bp09organic\\_01.jpg](http://unh.edu/news/cj_nr/2011/feb/bp09organic_01.jpg)

Caption: University of New Hampshire students in the Organic Garden Club operate a weekly farm stand on campus.

Credit: UNH Photographic Services

[http://unh.edu/news/cj\\_nr/2011/feb/bp09organic\\_02.jpg](http://unh.edu/news/cj_nr/2011/feb/bp09organic_02.jpg)

Caption: The University of New Hampshire's new Sustainable Agriculture and Food Systems major reflects the growing appetite for local, sustainable food, products and services.

Credit: UNH Photographic Services

[http://unh.edu/news/cj\\_nr/2011/feb/bp09organic\\_03.jpg](http://unh.edu/news/cj_nr/2011/feb/bp09organic_03.jpg)

Caption: The University of New Hampshire's new Sustainable Agriculture and Food Systems major will take advantage of the university's expansive facilities, such as the Organic Dairy Research Farm.

Credit: UNH Photographic Services

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