

Toward 10 years of Organic Farming Master's Degree at the University of Barcelona, Spain

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Abstract

Since 1999, the University of Barcelona has offered the first Master's Degree of Organic Farming in Spain, in response to the increasing demand for highly educated experts in organic farming. The objective is to provide a broad and deep knowledge of practices and techniques of Mediterranean organic agriculture and livestock production, and to develop the necessary skills to work in both public and private institutions and companies, as well as in science and research and in all fields demanding experts who can face new challenges in agroecology, sustainable agriculture, food quality, and nature conservation.

The Master's Degree, based on the Bologna Declaration on European ETCS system, is divided on 8 modules: 1. Introduction to organic agriculture, 2. The living soil, 3. Organic husbandry, 4. Basics in organic farming methods, 5. Food technology, 6. Certification, standards, marketing, and distribution, and economic feasibility in organic farming, 7. Organic farming research and advisory, and 8. Organic farming sustainability. The course lasts one year, from October to September.

This Master program, based on a multidisciplinary approach, offers several learning features: a) Lecture lessons: theoretical and practical lessons, seminars, farming tours, examination of knowledge gaps; attendance lessons are held once a month from Friday to Sunday, from October to July; b) Nonattendance education and practical training: e-learning, online forum and self-evaluation, lectures, briefs, personal homework; c) Resources: reading papers, theoretical and practice exercises, electronic dossiers; d) A Master's thesis is compulsory. Students have the opportunity to develop their thesis through work on a farm, with a company, or in any other suitable organic farming institution, or being part of a research program in public or private center. Two students have the possibility of doing their Master's thesis at FiBL; e) Highly qualified international lecturers and staff coming from different knowledge fields related to the organic movement.

Around 266 international organic farming experts have been qualified by the university in this period of time. After finishing their Master's degree, around the 60% of them found a job in the organic sector. The number of students over these years has increased and become stable.

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