

## **MEETING DEMAND WITH A NEW INTERDISCIPLINARY PROGRAM IN ORGANIC AGRICULTURE**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Organic food and fiber production without the use of synthetic pesticides or chemical fertilizers is the fastest-growing sector of the agricultural industry, fueled by consumer demand. The Interdisciplinary Studies Program in Organic Agriculture at Colorado State University provides a unique opportunity to study the science of organic production. Our program builds on a base of fundamental agricultural sciences with additional courses on organic agricultural methods, management and marketing. Colorado State University provides exceptional classroom and experiential learning opportunities to directly participate in identifying and treating the challenges associated with organic food production.

### **OUR PROGRAMS**

Colorado State University unveiled its new Interdisciplinary Program in Organic Agriculture in the Fall of 2006. The program is a cooperative effort of four departments in the College of Agricultural Sciences:

- \* Agricultural and Resource Economics
- \* Bioagricultural Sciences and Pest Management
- \* Horticulture and Landscape Architecture
- \* Soil and Crop Sciences

Students enrolled in the program take core courses from each of these contributing departments. The focus of the program is on the science of organic agricultural production.

### **OUR STUDENTS**

The program is designed for students with an interest in alternative agricultural production approaches, in particular, organic agriculture. This program is for agriculture and horticulture students considering a career in organic food production, or for any student concerned about the environmental and sociological impacts of conventional agricultural practices and interested in alternative approaches. Participating students are enrolled at Colorado State University and receive their degree from their home department, with completion of the Interdisciplinary Studies Program recorded on their official transcripts. We currently have 15 students enrolled in the organic agriculture program.

## **OUR COURSES**

Students build on a base of fundamental agricultural sciences with additional courses specifically focused on organic agriculture production techniques, business management, marketing, and decision-making. Lecture, discussion, lab, and internship experiences involve experiential learning at many levels. A vital part of the program is the required internship that gives students first-hand experience working in organic agricultural production or marketing.

Eight new courses have been developed to support this program including a freshmen-level gateway course entitled Environmental Issues in Agriculture, a hands-on, field-based summer course called Diagnosis and Treatment in Organic Fields, and a capstone course entitled Topics in Organic Agriculture. In addition, we have developed five 1-credit modules including Soil Ecology, Organic Soil Fertility, Composting Principles and Practices, Introduction to Crop Development Techniques, and Organic Greenhouse Production. Scholarships (\$1000 per year) have been donated for all participating students by a local organic dairy, and student numbers are building.

## **CONCLUSION**

Colorado State University developed the new organic agriculture program in response to the growing student and market interest in organic food and fiber products. The program will continue to develop and evolve in order to provide students with the most current science available in this developing arena. Organic agriculture is still in its infancy and providing students with a solid scientific understanding of production will allow them to participate in the organic industry on many levels via their career.