Education

Agroecology Education by Bicycle on Two Continents

In today’s world, it’s critical for students to learn how to converse and work effectively in a global environment. Much of the learning about international agroecology would ideally occur outside the classroom on visits to actual agroecosystems around the world. But such trips can be both costly and time-prohibitive.

Integrating adventure learning and systems action education into course design provides a unique approach to agroecology education. Experiential learning engages students in “head, heart, and hands” education, but can be challenging to implement in international contexts.

An adventure learning course in which University of Minnesota agronomy professor Paul Porter bicycled across Africa and South America provided students with a first-hand account of the landscapes, crops, people, and food systems of these continents. In order to overcome the barriers of cost and time, Porter and his team used distance technologies and online experiential learning techniques for students to learn about agroecosystems and agroecosystem analysis.

According to end-of-course surveys, students found the course to be unique and had an increased desire to travel abroad, which could have implications for agricultural programs trying to prepare students to work in a globalized world.


Students

U.S. Soil Judging Team Takes First

Last month, the U.S. Soil Judging Team placed first overall at the 2nd International Soil Judging Contest in Hungary. Kristen Pegues of Auburn University (3rd from left below) won the individual competition, and Kansas State’s Erin Bush (2nd from left) came in fourth. Stephen Geib, Delaware Valley College (rightmost), and Adrienne Nottingham, West Virginia University (leftmost), likewise turned in excellent performances, both placing in the top eight. Team USA also placed second in the group (team) competition. Coached by Joey Shaw of Auburn University, the students traveled to Hungary with support from the Agronomic Science Foundation.

Paul Porter interacting with villagers in northern Kenya while engaged in teaching an adventure learning course on agroecosystems and food systems.

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recognition for his work developing a root-knot nematode resistant cotton, which he named “Auburn Cotton.” He was recognized in 1986 as the Joint Cotton Breeding Policy Committee’s Cotton Breeder of the Year. Shepherd was a 27-year member of ASA and CSSA. Additionally, he was a member of the Honor Society of Phi Kappa Phi and Gamma Sigma Delta—the Honor Society of Agriculture.

During retirement, Shepherd was an avid gardener. He liked to fish, read the Wall Street Journal, and follow Auburn Tigers football. He was a long-time member of Auburn Lions Club and Lakeview Baptist Church.

Shepherd is survived by his wife, Margie, with whom he celebrated 65 years of marriage earlier this year. He is also survived by his three children and numerous grandchildren and great-grandchildren.