

News Release

U of M Crookston Students Gain Firsthand Insight into Swiss Agriculture

By Itollefs on Monday, June 27, 2011

Four University of Minnesota, Crookston students studied agricultural practices abroad in Switzerland from May 15 through May 29, 2011. Cities visited included Landquart, Chur, Sorenberg, and Luzern.

Abbie Westby, an agricultural education major from Pelican Rapids, Minn., was joined by Shelia Carleton, a senior majoring in agronomy and natural resources from Baxter, Minn.; Shelia Dombeck, a junior agronomy major from Perham, Minn.; and Alisha Fritz, a post-secondary enrollment option (PSEO) student from Perham, Minn.



The time abroad was the primary component of the Swiss mountain agriculture course through the U of M, Twin Cities College of Food, Agriculture, and Natural Resource Sciences (CFANS). This three credit summer course was offered through the U of M, Twin Cities, but other university students were invited to join. The four U of M, Crookston students joined with twelve students from the U of M, Twin Cities. The group was lead by Julie Tesch, who is an employee of the MN Ag Education Leadership Council (MAELC).

The purpose of the course was to give students greater understanding of spring time agricultural activities in a mountain ecosystem. Students witnessed management of farming enterprises to be productive in the context of Europe, and learn how Switzerland has developed their agro-tourism industry. Students also had the opportunity to interact directly with farmers, researchers, students, professionals, and government officials who share expertise and interest in agricultural issues as well as experience rural Swiss family life.

The first four days abroad the students stayed at Plantahof, an agricultural college in Landquart.

Each day the group visited various farms that were within driving distance. Students made visits to various farms including a co-operative called Landi; a fruit farm specializing in strawberries, raspberries, and plums; and a barn owned and operated by three farmers to reduce overhead and share the work load. Westby also was introduced to two separate agro-tourist farms. The first tourist farm gave visitors an opportunity to actually "sleep in the straw," which was their slogan, while the second, Kuhe-Villa, the cow villa, was focused on teaching visitors about the dairy industry. The group also had the opportunity to tour the city of Chur, which is the oldest and biggest city in Graubunden, one of 26 cantons (states) in Switzerland.

During the first weekend stay in Switzerland each student had the opportunity to experience Swiss home life by staying with a host family. Westby was joined by a U of M, Twin Cities student at a home in the village of Jenins in the Graubunden canton. The two students not only got to experience daily life in Switzerland; they worked right alongside their host parents to complete chores on the farm. Westby assisted with the spring haying process and spent time in the family's vineyard. She was even asked to assist with putting cowbells onto the cows before they left for the Alp pastures; a true Switzerland experience.

During their second week abroad, the students stayed at a holiday farm called, Birkenhof, in the town of Sorenberg. The students stayed in a renovated barn that was used to house tourists. Agricultural visits included touring a Holstein and water buffalo dairy farm, a deer farm specializing in meat production, and a cheese making factory. One of the more interesting specializations Westby saw was a sheep dairy farm. The sheep would stand on a pedestal to make milking more ergonomically friendly. Besides agricultural adventures, Westby also had the chance to visit the "Top of Europe," one of the highest places on the continent that can be visited by train.

Spending so much time on farms, it was easy to see differences in farming practices. A noticeable change coming from the Midwest was the size of Swiss farms. Most operations were family owned and in the 50-100 acre range, and because of the small field sizes much of the work was done by hand. The farms with cattle usually had between only 10-15 head noted Westby. She appreciated how the people she encountered in agriculture really cared about what they were doing.

One theme Westby noticed while in Switzerland was the conservation and conscientious use of resources. During her host family stay she was given the task of raking up all extra hay that was left in the field so that nothing was wasted. In the mountains, with less grass able to grow, every last bit is important for Swiss farmers to feed their livestock. Westby appreciated the fact that the best land the country had to offer was reserved for farming only. In the flat areas of the mountain valleys farmers produced their grain crops and other crops that couldn't survive in the higher, steeper altitudes. Very few houses and cities were put on the flat land which was more valuable for farming. Westby commented, "When they only have so much workable land to use it makes sense that agriculture is put first instead of personal use."

The time traveling in Switzerland put agriculture into a new perspective for Westby. She was able to take her knowledge past the farming practices of Midwestern America, "To truly understand agriculture you need to expand your experiences past what is common to what you already know." These experiences will prove valuable as Westby prepares for student teaching in the Spring of 2012.

From Westby's perspective, the push with American agriculture is to get everything done with bigger and better machines and technology, "This approach works just fine because we have vast areas of land and we need to be efficient. In other countries, bigger and faster are not always the most effective way to produce their products. "

Today the University of Minnesota, Crookston delivers 29 bachelor's degree programs, 18 minors, and more than 40 concentrations, including several online degrees, in the areas of agriculture and natural resources; business; liberal arts and education; and math, science and technology. With an enrollment of about 1,400 undergraduates from more than 25 countries and 40 states, the Crookston campus offers a supportive, close-knit atmosphere that leads to a prestigious University of Minnesota degree. "Small Campus. Big Degree." To learn more, visit www.umcrookston.edu.

In the photo, (l to r): *Sheila Carlton, Abbie Westby, Shelia Dombeck, and Alisha Fritz spent two weeks studying agriculture in Switzerland.*

News Categories

[Department - Agriculture and Natural Resources](#)

Tweet

[News Home](#)

[News Archives](#)



Small Campus. Big Degree..

[Employment](#)
[Events Calendar](#)
[Academic Calendar](#)
[Library](#)
[Directories](#)
[Maps, Directions & Parking](#)
[Quick Facts](#)
[Bookstore](#)

[Faculty & Staff](#)
[Email & Calendar](#)
[Contact Webmaster](#)
[System Website](#)
[Home](#)

2900 University Ave., Crookston, MN 56716
800-862-6466 | 218-281-6510 | umcinfo@umn.edu

© 2021 Regents of the University of Minnesota. All rights reserved.

The University of Minnesota is an equal opportunity educator and employer.
[Privacy Statement](#)