

BEST PRACTICES

Zentrum für ökologischen Landbau Universität Hohenheim
Center for ecological agriculture at Hohenheim University

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Institutional information

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Summary

Explain your case in one or two sentences

The Center for Organic Farming at Hohenheim University offers

- the curriculum on organic farming at the University of Hohenheim*
- the organic research projects of the various institutes at our university*
- current events on organic farming in Hohenheim, Baden Württemberg, Germany and internationally*

Hohenheim University is based in Stuttgart and is Germany's largest agricultural university. It rank among the top 5 agricultural universities in Europe and among top 10 worldwide.

Background information: How was the situation previous to your actions?

The Center for Organic Farming was one of the first HEI offering BA, MA and PhD programs for organic farming as a full-time study program. The program comes in modules.

The future of agriculture is faced with a wide range of challenges. It should produce healthy food in sufficient quantities, maintain nature and the environment and should safeguard jobs and income of farmers. Organic farming holds excellent potential to address these complex issues. The guiding idea of organic farming is to manage agriculture in a way that is consistent with and enhances natural life processes. The farm is understood as an organism within which soil, plants, animals and humans interact. Therefore, the interdisciplinary nature of farming systems is a central concept of organic farming.

Organic farming plays a prominent role in research and teaching at the University of Hohenheim. Teaching and research, in line with the idea of the organism and its interdisciplinary nature, are not covered by one single institute but are rather coordinated and organized by the Center for Organic Farmer. This approach encourages interdisciplinary work between the institutes and promotes systems thinking in students. Consequently, teaching related to organic farming is usually conducted in an interdisciplinary way, i.e. experts teach aspects of plant and animal production as well as aspects of processing and economics which are of particular importance for organic farming or differ from other agricultural systems.

The Organic Agriculture and Food Systems Master's program is designed and structured according to these principles and covers the entire food chain from field to table. All courses are offered in English in order to account for the growing worldwide interest in organic farming.

Almost all institutes and departments at the university are involved in research related to organic farming. Research as well as proposals for research funding are coordinated by the Center for Organic Farming. Scientists are thereby supported in their application process and with possibilities to cooperate.

For teaching and experimental research in organic farming, the organic research station Kleinhohenheim is located close to campus (about 3 km) and provides a variety of infrastructure, including fields (about 60 ha), buildings, machinery and personnel. This allows for going beyond a theoretical understanding of organic farming by illustrating problems in a practical context and provides the opportunity for students to experience organic farming in practice.

What were the needs you identified?

They identified a clear need for such a HEI-based study program based on modules which can be taken in addition to traditional agricultural studies. Students of the Bachelor program Agricultural Sciences can choose between elective modules related to organic farming (these modules are in German language). Students of "Agricultural Biology" and "Sustainable Raw Materials and Bioenergy" can choose the courses after they have gained the consent of the examination board.

The Master Program says: The ecological market is growing worldwide, and consumers are increasingly interested in the quality of food and the sustainable production of food. That is why the demand for experts in

the area of organic agriculture is also increasing. The degree program can be studied as a “single degree” or as a “double degree,” for which the students spend the second year of studies at one of four partner universities.

What solution you found to cover those needs?

Curriculum

Information on the different modules can be found in the module catalog.

In the first year of studies, eight compulsory modules cover the most basic aspects of organic agriculture and the foodstuff chain: high product quality, health use of natural and human resources, maintaining biodiversity, and introducing sustainable production systems without artificial pesticides and fertilizers. The problem-oriented, interdisciplinary “Project in Organic Agriculture and Food Systems” represents a key element of the program and is worth 12 credits.

In the second year of studies, students can develop a specific profile according to their own interests. Students who decide to do a double degree spend their third and fourth semesters at one of three partner universities.

Universität für Bodenkultur (BOKU), Austria

Warschauer Universität für Naturwissenschaften, Poland

Aarhus Universität, Denmark

ISARA Lyon, France

With this time abroad, the students obtain more in-depth insights in the ecological sector in a second European country. This will expand your life and work experience both culturally and professionally. The Master's thesis can be completed as part of an ongoing research project in Hohenheim (“Single Degree”) or at a partner university (“Double Degree”).

What actions did you take to reach the solution?

We defined clear objectives:

Biological agriculture is based on a holistic perspective, which is why processing and marketing organic products requires specialized knowledge. Students obtain skills and knowledge in all relevant aspects of ecological agriculture (production, processing, marketing, certification):

- *Organic crop production*
- *Ecological Animal Husbandry*
- *Ecological Agriculture in the Tropics and Subtropics*
- *Food Chains and Networks in Ecological Agriculture*
- *Market development of organic farming in various European countries*

Students also learn:

- *to work in a team in a structure and goal-oriented manner.*

- to lead teams
- to systematically work through problem-solving approaches

If any, which partners or other organisations did you involve during the process?

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What were the main problems or difficulties you had to face?

Financing and certification, but all this is taken care of now. HEI studies in Germany are free of tuition. Third country national students need to pay a minimum fee.

What is the situation now, after your actions?

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Main lessons learned along the way? *

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Annex:





Modules Center for Organic Farming

The Master programm in Organic Agriculture and Food Systems includes eight compulsory modules that cover the key elements of the organic food chain, including agronomic, economic and sociological aspects. Below you can find a list of compulsory and elective modules.

Compulsory modules for Organic Agriculture and Food Systems (elective modules for all other programs at the Faculty of Agricultural Sciences):

- [3401-460 Organic Plant Production](#)
- [3405-500 Principles of Organic Food Systems \(double degree\)](#)
- [3405-470 Organic Food Systems and Concepts \(single degree\)](#)
- [3405-490 Project in Organic Agriculture and Food Systems](#)
- [3405-460 Processing and Quality of Organic Food](#)

Elective Modules for Organic Agriculture and Food Systems:

- [3405-410 Organic Farming in the Tropics and Subtropics](#)
- [3405-450 Problems and Perspectives of Organic Farming](#)

[Module Catalogue](#) Degree Program Organic Agriculture and Food Systems