

Spring 2009

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Center for International Education

Spring 2009

IA ALUMNA DISCOVERS FASCINATING WORLD OF FOOD CULTURE AND PRODUCTION THROUGH ITALIAN GRADUATE PROGRAM

by **Jacqueline Lewin '05**

Jacqueline Lewin graduated from UNH in 2005 with a dual major in international affairs and French. Her interest in the Slow Food movement has led her to a masters program at the University of Gastronomic Sciences in Colorno, Italy.

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In Bergen, Norway, crabs are a burden in the nets of most fisherman, but the students of UNISG are happy to detangle the mess and enjoy a real treat!

From warm baguettes to spicy olives to freshly made lasagne, and now to fragrant basmati rice, my hunger for "good, clean and fair" food has taken me from France to Southern Italy, up to Northern Italy and over to New Dehli, India, where I am currently. But, my post-baccalaureate studies haven't been a simple search for the best meal. As I've come to learn so well, the exchange that occurs from the field to the table is one that contains history, arts, economies, ethics, ecologies, cultural preferences and traditions, and it is through this wide lens of food and agriculture that I am learning how to see our global community.

I graduated from UNH in 2005 with a degree in French Studies and International Affairs and studied abroad in Strasbourg, France, to use my French language skills and gain a better understanding of European politics. It was during this time that my passion for learning about what people all over the world were eating was ignited. I returned to Portsmouth, NH, where I joined the local Slow Food group to try to meet local farmers and like-minded community members. There, I

realized that I didn't want to know just **what** people were eating globally, but **why** we eat what we eat. Being involved with Slow Food, I learned more about the various aspects of the organization, including the masters program it runs in Colorno, Italy, within its University of Gastronomic Sciences (UNISG). I enrolled in the program called *Gastronomic Science and Quality Products* because it comprehensively explored the food world from all angles and was taught in Italian. Although I spoke no Italian at the time, my love of languages along with my eagerness for adventure prompted me to choose this program despite the fact that there was a similar course offered in English. Confronted with the challenge of needing to learn a new language and wanting to remain connected to food, I took advantage of something I had heard about from fellow travellers: WWOOF (Willing Work on Organic Farms).

UNH's new Dual Major in EcoGastronomy

UNH undergraduates who wish to combine their interests in sustainable agriculture, hospitality and nutrition can now choose a dual major in EcoGastronomy. The program is administered jointly by the College of Life Sciences and Agriculture and the Whittemore School of Business and Economics in conjunction with the UNH Office of Sustainability.

In addition to the program courses, students are required to study for a semester at the University of Gastronomic Sciences in Pollenzo, Italy, and establish language proficiency in Italian. For more information, visit unh.edu/eco-gastronomy.

Two months before beginning my graduate program, I travelled to Puglia, in southern Italy, and volunteered on an organic olive farm where little English was spoken. It was perfect. I combined my desire to learn about and participate in food production, while learning Italian and of course, eating well. On the farm I discovered the magic of sustainable living. After eating only local produce for the duration of my stay, I realized that I never knew that farmers had it so good. I indulged in fresh vegetables, beans, pulses and pasta made from ancient grain varieties, with the occasional treat of *lardo* (pork fat cured with rosemary and spices), and my new favorite condiment--cold-pressed olive oil.

From Puglia to Parma I began my year at UNISG. It is an intensive masters program which teaches about food using a unique approach. Each day on campus was filled with five hours of lectures covering such subjects as the *Microbiology of Cheese, Wine and Cured Meats, Sociology of Food*

Consumption, and Product Labelling and Marketing. Then, to supplement the class time with practical experiences, each month we went on a thematic and/or regional trip which was organized by the university. The goal of these trips is to see (and occasionally participate in) firsthand the production of diverse food products ranging from artisanally-made treasures to large-scale industrial foodstuffs.

In Jaen, Spain, we toured the heart of industrial olive-oil production, and I left understanding that quantity is not quality. In the Languedoc region of southern France, we saw all the steps of making goat cheese on a small-scale production level: from goats grazing in green pastures, to being milked, to the transformation of milk into cheese, and finally, to tasting the creamy, somewhat lemony cheeses. In Norway one night we fished for our dinner deep in the fjords and another feasted on smoked sheep's head prepared as the Vikings made it. Travelling outside of and within Italy helped round out my perspective on food. Learning about diverse cultures through the scope of food has given me a deeper understanding of what global citizenship means to me.

Studying food has been delicious and full of adventure, but it has taught me that our daily food choices are not isolated decisions: they affect the whole world. The use of chemicals and cheap labor that is employed by large agri-business is contaminating our daily diet, destroying the environment, and continuing the vicious cycle of poverty amongst farmers, particularly in developing countries. Unique food cultures were birthed by nature's abundance and now biodiversity and traditional knowledge are at risk. Throughout my journeys I discovered that the industrial food world has robbed us of our right to taste! And it was because of this discovery that I am in India, interning with scientist and activist Dr. Vandana Shiva.

Dr. Vandana Shiva is a prominent voice pertaining to environmental, food, and patent-related issues in the international community. She has founded an organization, Navdanya, which reaches out to thousands of farmers in rural India, and restores them with the traditional knowledge they lost when the conventional (chemical based) model of agriculture was introduced during India's Green Revolution. At Navdanya I am working against the acceptance of India's first genetically modified food crop, Bt Brinjal, which is an eggplant variety.

I have no specific plans yet after my internship here in India. Eventually I would like to open a "farm to fork" style restaurant in



In southern Sicily women clean anchovies and hand pack them in local olive oil.

New England, and use my education and experiences to establish a teaching farm that would emphasize local agricultural practices as a means to a healthy, low impact lifestyle. This would be a way for me to share what I've learned and get back to my own cultural roots. But, until then I will continue to explore the world using food as my guide. Already it has changed the way I see myself and my place in this very global, but very connected society. I am sure that wherever I go will be filled with new languages, new friendships, new (or really old) ways of living, and yes, new tastes.



Celebrating the diversity of Indian Bt Brinjal (eggplant) in New Delhi.



A copper cauldron is used to heat curds and whey in the process of making Slow Food Presidium Cheese "Monte Veronese."



The Saturday market in Palermo, Sicily boasts the seasons freshest bounty (including artichokes).

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