



For more information on the Fund, or about methods and advantages of charitable giving through the University of Maine Foundation, please contact  
Amos E. Orcutt, President and CEO  
e-mail: [orcutt@maine.edu](mailto:orcutt@maine.edu)  
or by telephone 207.581.5100  
or  
Two Alumni Place  
Orono, Maine 04469-5792  
or 100 Foden Road, Suite 303, W. Building  
South Portland, ME 04106  
207-253-5172 or 800-449-2629

[www.umainefoundation.org](http://www.umainefoundation.org)



## THE SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE IMPROVEMENT FUND

“The first Sustainable Agriculture Program in the Nation”

### University of Maine Leads the Way

Ecologically responsible and economically resilient agriculture and forestry systems are important to the long-term sustainability of the nation's natural resources. Since the mid-1980s, the University of Maine has taken a leadership role in emphasizing principles and practices of sustainability and in 1988, established the nation's first undergraduate degree program in Sustainable Agriculture.

Wallace C. Dunham, Dean of the College of Life Sciences and Agriculture and Director of the Maine Agricultural Experiment Station in the 1980s, firmly committed the University's upper-level administration to a path emphasizing the concepts and practices of sustainable agriculture. In an interview published in 1989, Dunham explicitly identified reducing reliance on synthetic fertilizers and pesticides as a way to increase farm profitability and better protect environmental quality and human health. Initially, this was a hard sell with farmers and agricultural leaders because it was a major shift in thinking and agricultural practices. Faculty and students of the newly formed Sustainable Agriculture Program met those criticisms head on eventually winning over the state of Maine's agricultural commodity groups who demonstrated their support by sending letters to the University's administration in support of the Sustainable Agriculture Program.

“The Sustainable Agriculture Program at the University of Maine provided me a unique experience I couldn't have received anywhere else. I learned from experts in their fields who had a passion for what they researched, and they challenged their students to apply their knowledge not only in the classroom but also in the field and laboratory. The diversity of subjects I was exposed to is a highly valued asset-by the end of my undergraduate career I was a soil scientist, weed ecologist, plant pathologist, microbiologist, chemist...not many college graduates can say that.”

--Ryan Lynch, B.S. '04

### The Program

The University of Maine began offering a B.S. degree in Sustainable Agriculture in 1988. It is an interdisciplinary program offered cooperatively by the faculties of the Departments of Plant, Soil and Environmental Sciences, Biological Sciences, and Resource Economics and Policy as well as University of Maine Cooperative Extension, and a faculty from the USDA/ARS on the Orono campus. In addition to the core courses, students obtain knowledge and skills in the liberal arts, mathematics, sciences, and communications. There are opportunities for hands-on experience with the Black Bear Food Guild, a student-run community supported agriculture endeavor, the Tractor Club and other student activities.



### The academic program emphasizes:

- How to increase farm profits by decreasing the costs of crop and livestock production;
- How to build soil tilth and fertility through rotations, multiple cropping, and nutrient cycling;
- How to protect water quality by decreasing the need to use synthetic agrichemicals;
- How to manage crop pests and livestock diseases with integrated, ecologically sound strategies; and how to create a strong, diversified agriculture that is sustainable through market and weather fluctuations.



Faculty in the program conduct research that provides students the opportunity for hands-on field experience. A good example is the large-scale comparative cropping systems experiment, known as the Potato Ecosystem Project, which has won the political support of the potato industry and has served as an excellent vehicle for training graduate students in agroecological approaches as well as providing undergraduates valuable field experience.

#### Students Say it Best

Our students say it best when they talk about the value of the program. Below are some quotes from a number of students. There is a common thread that runs through their experiences; words like unique and passionate; a program that offers many educational options and alternatives.

“When I first came to the Sustainable Agriculture program, I thought that I wanted to be a farmer and that a degree in Sustainable Agriculture would prepare me for little else. In the four years that I've been in the program, I've watched several friends from within the major graduate and find their perfect dream jobs. I will be going to a



wonderful apprenticeship right after graduation, and then I get to choose from a wide variety of options, including graduate programs, educational outreach, or working on other Organic and Sustainable farms in the Northeast.”

*Heather Westwood, B.S. '06*

“When I transferred to the University of Maine I originally intended only to get my B.S. in Botany and was unsure of where to go from there. My plan (or lack of one) changed when I took Introduction to Sustainable Agriculture. That one course eventually led me to a minor in the program and, far more importantly, left me with a purpose after graduation. I think that sustainable agriculture is more than an alternative to conventional agriculture; it's the only option we have. I hope that the University of Maine continues to offer this unique program and that it can inspire others as it did me.”

*Eben Bell, SAG Minor, '05*

“The Sustainable Ag program has helped me understand the economics of agriculture from local, and world perspective. From Intro to Plant Science through our senior capstone course, the professors in this program have been enthusiastic about the information presented to us and about our success in the program. This program strives to challenge each student to show each of us that the extent of our abilities as students and of knowledgeable people goes beyond what we felt we were capable of doing. Overall, the Sustainable Agriculture program, with small, intimate class sizes and many knowledgeable professors, provides emphasis on leadership and self-confidence in each student's knowledge base as they prepare to enter the field of agricultural production and/or research.”

*Chris Howard, B.S. '03*

#### Why the Fund?

Although there is increasing competition for students in sustainable agriculture, organic agriculture and agroecology, the continued increase in consumer demand for organic foods, and resulting increase in organic acreage world wide, suggests that the Sustainable Agriculture major will be needed to educate and train individuals who will farm or support farmers in this industry. The University of Maine is distinguished as having the first undergraduate pro-

gram in sustainable agriculture in the United States and it remains one of only two such programs in the country according to a recent report entitled, "Educational and Training Opportunities in Sustainable Agriculture." The 16th edition ([http://www.nal.usda.gov/afsic/AFSIC\\_pubs/edtr.htm](http://www.nal.usda.gov/afsic/AFSIC_pubs/edtr.htm), August 2005).

Consumer demand exists for healthful food produced in environmentally-protective ways. One of the best ways to ensure a safe and secure food supply is to know exactly where the food supply comes from. More independent farmers at the local level, who produce good food, make a good living and, at the same time, protect the environment through sustainable practices are the products of a sustainable agriculture education at the University of Maine. Not all students want to be farmers. For those who do not wish to go into farming, there are opportunities to work with state, national and even international agencies such as a National Resources Conservation Service, World Hunger Relief, and through University Cooperative Extension offices. The program also prepares students for advanced graduate study opportunities and volunteer programs, such as the Peace Corp.

Competition for traditional-aged college-bound students has intensified. Fewer students seeking careers in agriculture and a growing number of universities who offer courses, but not degree programs, in sustainable agriculture, add to the challenge of recruiting students to the program. And without adequate resources for advertising the strengths and advantages of our program, getting the word out to potential students becomes ever more difficult.

In order to recruit the brightest and the best, we need to increase scholarships, particularly recruiting scholarships, to attract students to the program. We need to continue to enhance our teaching programs so that the student experience will be challenging and rewarding. And we need to make sure potential students hear our unique story. The Fund will enable faculty to publicize our opportunities and advantages to potential students within our region and beyond. The Fund will also enable us to design creative programming that may bring potential students to campus to learn first hand about the program. This new programming will also benefit current students.

#### How Can You Support the Sustainable Agriculture Program Improvement Fund?

There are a number of ways that you can contribute to the Sustainable Agriculture Program Improvement Fund held at the University of Maine Foundation. The simplest method of giving is by check. Other methods are appreciated securities, real and personal property, pooled income fund, through bequests, charitable remainder trusts, charitable gift annuities or a gift of life insurance.

Tax planning is an important aspect of charitable giving. The tax laws are specifically designed to encourage charitable giving by lowering the cost of making a donation. The Foundation encourages donors to consult their personal tax and legal advisors regarding all charitable gifts.

All inquiries are kept confidential. For more information on the Fund, or about methods and advantages of charitable giving through the University of Maine Foundation, please contact Amos E. Orcutt, President and CEO (e-mail: [orcutt@maine.edu](mailto:orcutt@maine.edu)) or by telephone 207.581.5100.

For more information about the Sustainable Agriculture Program, please contact:

Dr. Marianne Sarrantonio

Plant, Soil and Environmental Sciences,

5722 Deering Hall, University of Maine, Orono, ME 04469-5782

[mariann2@maine.edu](mailto:mariann2@maine.edu), 207.581.2913.

