

11th International Agroecology Shortcourse Cultural Memory, Biodiversity and Agroecology: Linking tradition, education and science for sustainability

San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas, México
July 11-24, 2010

Course Report



The 11th International Agroecology Shortcourse was held this summer in San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas, México. The course was a collaborative effort between the Community Agroecology Network (CAN), El Colegio de la Frontera Sur (ECOSUR), and the Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social (CIESAS). With the support of Green Mountain Coffee Roasters, 10 coffee growing producers and cooperative members from throughout Chiapas, Oaxaca, Veracruz, and Nicaragua were able to attend with full scholarships; in total the course was able to support 19 participants with full and partial scholarships. Altogether, more than 45 people, including producers, cooperative members, NGO representatives, community members, students, professors, educators, restaurant owners, local farmers and more from seven different countries came together for two weeks to exchange experiences and perspectives about Agroecology. The diversity, commitment and sharing within the group lead to a truly unique and intercultural learning experience for all.

The course centered on the topic of Cultural Memory, Biodiversity and Agroecology: Linking tradition, education and science for sustainability. Chiapas and the surrounding regions of Mesoamerica are responsible for 5,000 years of agrobiodiversity and cultural knowledge that has adapted in a wide spectrum of environments. From the onset at our first class discussion, the group identified the agroecological importance of passing on the cultural memory of older generations onto younger ones. People voiced a concern that campesinos who maintain agricultural knowledge are aging while younger generations are migrating into urban areas and pursuing other jobs and professions. Others shared examples of how school



Traditional chinampa agroecosystem



gardens and farmer-to-farmer exchanges have successfully helped to reverse this trend.

Highlights of the course included fieldtrips to traditional and newer markets, trips to local farms, a humorous and educational activity titled “Confessions of an Agroecologist”, and a diverse range of course presentations related to the field of agroecology. A series of evening presentations open to the public of San Cristóbal de Las Casas, commenced with local farmers from Chiapas and other parts of México who presented their perspectives on the changes of modern agriculture and their innovative approaches to maintain and adapt traditional agroecological practices. In addition, teachers and educators from all over Mexico were invited to a full day of presentations and discussions on school gardens over the weekend during the course and as a result we formed a new network of school gardens throughout Mesoamerica.



We closed our two weeks of learning and intercultural exchange with a traditional Mayan altar and ceremony, followed by a mariachi group performing live music while everyone danced and celebrated. We all left the course with new friendships, inspiration and renewed energy to creatively pursue the field of Agroecology.

§