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Nextfood - Educating the next generation of professionals in the agrifood system

Practice Abstract #8: Small scale farmers contributing to Agroecology education at Farmers Training Centre in Ethiopia

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Farmers' Training Centres (FTC) were established to serve as colleges for the small scale farming community in rural Ethiopia. The Master program in Agroecology and Sustainable Development at Mekelle University used this opportunity to co-create knowledge between the FTC stakeholders, instructors and students through experiential learning based action research program. The courses designed to create this linkage were Agroecological Innovations I and II. The Master program students spent half day orientation with course instructors at the FTC and spent about two hours of time with FTC stakeholders trying to understand the present situation of the farming and food systems. The FTC stakeholders selected representative case sites and client farmers for each student. Students completed the data collection through participatory approaches and generated report for the course evaluation at the University. The students presented their report in front of their client farmers and FTC stakeholders to see how they understood the present situation, envision and recommend in the future situation. This created opportunity for the individual farmers to learn from their peer experience and students opinions. Valuable comments were forwarded to the students from the farming community that contributed in their learning. In the process of generating future agricultural professionals it is necessary to link real life problems with the education system. Higher education institutions in agriculture should use this opportunity to co-learn from the existing and new practices among stakeholders. Education programs designed in this way can provide insight for the academic institutions to revise and develop new curriculums that can address local needs on a sustainable basis.