

**Written by Natalie Hampton, CALS Communication Services,
for "Global Eyes," NC State's International Programs' newsletter**

On a five-hectare operation near Montevideo, Uruguay, the Bentancur brothers raise organic vegetables as well as grass-fed beef they sell to area supermarkets through the Punte Verde organic group. Nearby, Dante Villarino and his family are the fourth generation working a 20-hectare vineyard that has recently begun producing organic merlot sold through the family winery.

Five hours north at BIO-Uruguay International – a non-profit research and extension center dedicated to sustainable agriculture – growers share their knowledge of organic vegetable and meat production.

These are a few examples of the sites that a group from the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences experienced in December as part of the Short Course on Organic Agriculture and Culture in Latin America. The trip was organized by the Center for Environmental Farming Systems, with funding from a U.S. Department of Agriculture International Science and Education grant. Twenty-three faculty, students and Cooperative Extension agents traveled to Uruguay for a 10-day trip.

Partners for the short course included the Universidad de la Empresa in Montevideo and BIO-Uruguay in Tacuarembó. One goal of the USDA grant program is to provide international experiences for U.S. faculty. “As a land-grant, we wanted to represent that fully,” said Paul Mueller, the College’s interim assistant dean for international programs, professor of crop science, and an organizer of the Uruguay trip.

In addition to farming operations, the group visited two research stations of INIA, Uruguay’s equivalent to the USDA Agricultural Research Service. Armando Rabuffetti, director of INIA’s Las Brujas center near Montevideo, earned his doctorate at N.C. State University, and the late Doug Sanders of the Horticultural Science Department had strong ties to Las Brujas.

CEFS faculty members decided to travel to Uruguay because of prior relationships between CEFS and Alda Rodriguez, director of BIO-Uruguay, Mueller said. Rodriguez was a partner in the Agromedicine Institute, based at East Carolina University, and had visited CEFS on two occasions.

While visiting the farming operations in Uruguay, three groups conducted case studies on the sustainability of each operation. The case studies were presented to the entire group, including collaborators from UDE and BIO. Three students who earned credit hours for trip, also developed written case studies of the operations focusing on economic, environmental and social sustainability.

Each case study group included students, campus-based faculty and Cooperative Extension agents representing a number of disciplines: food science, horticulture, crop science, animal science and communications.

All trip participants had to commit to spend some time learning Spanish. Though no funds were allocated for Spanish language training, Mueller said he was impressed with participants' commitment to learning Spanish.

One goal of the program is to continue the relationships between N.C. State and Uruguay with student and possibly faculty exchanges. This summer, three student interns from UDE will come to participate in N.C. State projects. Discussion is underway on sending several N.C. State students to work on projects in Uruguay.

Participants posted their insights and photos from the Uruguay trip in a Web log. To read more, visit: <http://blogs.lib.ncsu.edu/page/uruguay>.

Photos by Natalie Hampton



Jean Marie: Crop science professor Jean-Marie Luginbuhl, left, translates for an organic farmer, center, who explains his operation to the group from CEFS.



INIA: Armando Rabuffetti, right, director of INIA's Las Brujas center, explains a hog research project to the group.



Lisa and bug: Lisa Forehead, center, of CEFS examines a beneficial insect in a greenhouse operation. Looking on are from left, Emily Vollmer, Melissa Bell and Laura Vance.