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**Project Title:** Exploring Extension Exchange Possibilities with Bern University of Applied Science in Switzerland

**Summary:**

This Global Perspectives project exploring the Swiss Extension system and the Bern University of Applied Sciences School of Agricultural, Forest and Food Sciences (HAFL) was very successful. We were able to complete an informative visit with several key stops. We were able to learn strategies that can be implemented to potentially improve UW Extension. We also learned unique strengths to the Swiss system that would be difficult and likely not appropriate to duplicate at UW Extension.

We were provided an overview of Swiss Agriculture and Agricultural policy which gave context for the entire visit. We then were provided an overview of the Swiss system for agricultural extension and education. To gain a better understanding we also visited Swiss Extension and Experiment Station Centers as well as farms that current utilize extension.

## **Overview of Swiss System for Agricultural Extension and Education – The Swiss Extension system is highly integrated with the education system.**

Farming is a profession in Switzerland. To purchase or manage a farm an individual needs to receive a minimum of professional training and/or certificates. This is controlled through the ability to purchase a farm as well as the direct payments a farmer is eligible for from the Swiss government. Most farmers obtain this education through the extension system and/or applied universities. Most of the farmers feel a connection with extension because of the base education they receive creating a link so that they are comfortable coming to extension for workshops and advice.

Vocational Education Training (VET). After completion of the 9<sup>th</sup> grade, students can choose a higher education path or the VET path. Most farmers choose the VET path. Students enroll in the farming VET from age 16 through 18 (3 years). During those three years the students work on a farm and attend classes once a week at the Extension office. VET instructors are often also extension educators.

Bachelor of Agriculture – In order to receive a bachelor of Ag at HAFL students must first complete the 3-year VET training or a 1-year intensive farm residency program. This is also required of anyone wanting to become an extension educator. The Extension Director stated that he would not want to hire individuals that could not “speak the language of a farmer”.

Extension – Canton based (A Swiss State, but similar also to our counties). Extension also provides both advisory service as well as workshops/classes for farmers.

- **Two Potential Implementable Ideas for Wyoming**

- Farmer Working Groups – A group of farmers that meets quarterly on each other’s farms with the goal of peer-to-peer learning. There is generally a specific learning topic associated with each of the meetings as well. These working groups are facilitated by extension.
- Extension Charter – The Swiss Extension system has developed a charter with 4 rules for engaging with farmers. While the charter with rules may not fit Wyoming, I think developing a set of 4-5 best practices for engaging clientele could be valuable for each of our focus areas.

Agridea – is quasi government entity that works with extension. They offer over 100 courses (2 hours to 1 week in length) targeted to extension advisors. Farmers can enroll for many of the courses as well, but the focus is on extension.

### **Visit to Grangeneuve and BBZN Extension Centers**

The Vocational Education Training center, Extension, and Experiment Station are combined into centers at the Cantonal level. Grangeneuve is located in the Friborg Canton and BBZN is located in Luzern Canton.

Extension courses or workshops are free for farmers to attend. They do seek cost recovery on some courses similar to the way we operate at UWE. Extension advisory service from Grangeneuve advisors is free for the first hour, but is billed at a rate of 100 Swiss Francs per hour. BBZN does not offer a free first hour.

The experiment stations included forage crops, row crops, orchards, dairy barns and other livestock facilities. VET teachers and Extension use the experiment station for hands on workshops and training.

Farmers are subject to a lot of regulation in Switzerland and must comply to maximize their direct payments which can be 50,000 Swiss Francs annually. Because of this extension spends about 1/3 of their time on production type issues and training and 2/3 of the time teaching how to navigate the direct payment system.

### **Farm Visits**

We visited farms focused on dairy, beef, dual purpose cattle, sheep, goats, pigs, and yaks. Many of the farms also had components of agritourism.

### **IP-Suisse**

A label/certification program that takes a pragmatic approach to farm certification and labeling. The label was developed by producers that felt organic restrictions were not efficient and too onerous.

IP-Suisse has contracts with the largest food distributors and retailers in Switzerland and has become a widely recognized brand by Swiss consumers. I found it on many of the products in the grocery stores.

### **Swiss Federal Office for Agriculture (FOAG)**

FOAG is similar to USDA and serves as a funding source, provides policy direction, assigns research targets, and provides data. Data was limited and mainly focused on direct payment compliance.

### **Future Collaboration Potential**

- Grad students from HAFL would like to attend Wyoming Ranch Camp. 1-3 Grad students are likely to attend the next camp.
- The professor who presented a rural development presentation was interested in collaboration with UWE. After he described some of the projects in Switzerland, I asked him about leadership training. They had tried some in the past without much success but were very interested in our CVH approach. There may be an opportunity for CVH educators to provide a train the trainer workshop for Swiss counterparts.
- In many ways HAFL has similarities to RMAL in terms of the applied nature of the education. There may be opportunities to pursue in this area.
- Finally, while they offer PhD degrees, they do not have the capability to offer all the needed courses. Their PhD students regularly attend semesters at other universities. There may be an opportunity to explore this further and see if CALSNR departments could work with HAFL to form a relationship where students could attend a semester at UW.

Bern University of Applied Sciences School of Agricultural, Forest and Food Sciences HAFL



Grangeneuve Extension Center



Pictures from Swiss Farms

