

# Do you know a deserving student?

Wendy Holm, P.Ag.

**K**now a deserving student? Have a son, daughter or grandchildren in university? Want to rock their world? Then send them to Cuba with me this May to join students from across Canada enrolled in the University of British Columbia's 3-credit course AGSC302 — Field Studies in Sustainable Agriculture Cuba.



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From the moment they touch down April 30 in Havana until the tearful goodbyes in Varadero three weeks later, students are challenged to examine what

they see through a new lens of sustainability. Inevitably, as we travel through Cuba visiting farms, research centres, urban gardens and universities, a paradigm shift occurs that unalterably the way they look at the world and their place in it!

Developed in 2005 for UBC's Faculty of Land and Food Systems and facilitated by ANAP, Cuba's farmer organization, this three week fully accredited university course creates face to face dialogues with professors and students from Cuba's leading agricultural universities and training schools, representatives of Cuba's Ministry of Agriculture and top agricultural professional organizations. We visit farmer cooperatives across the country, seeing first hand examples of sustainability in practice based on biological pest controls, organic agriculture, worm composting and intercropping.

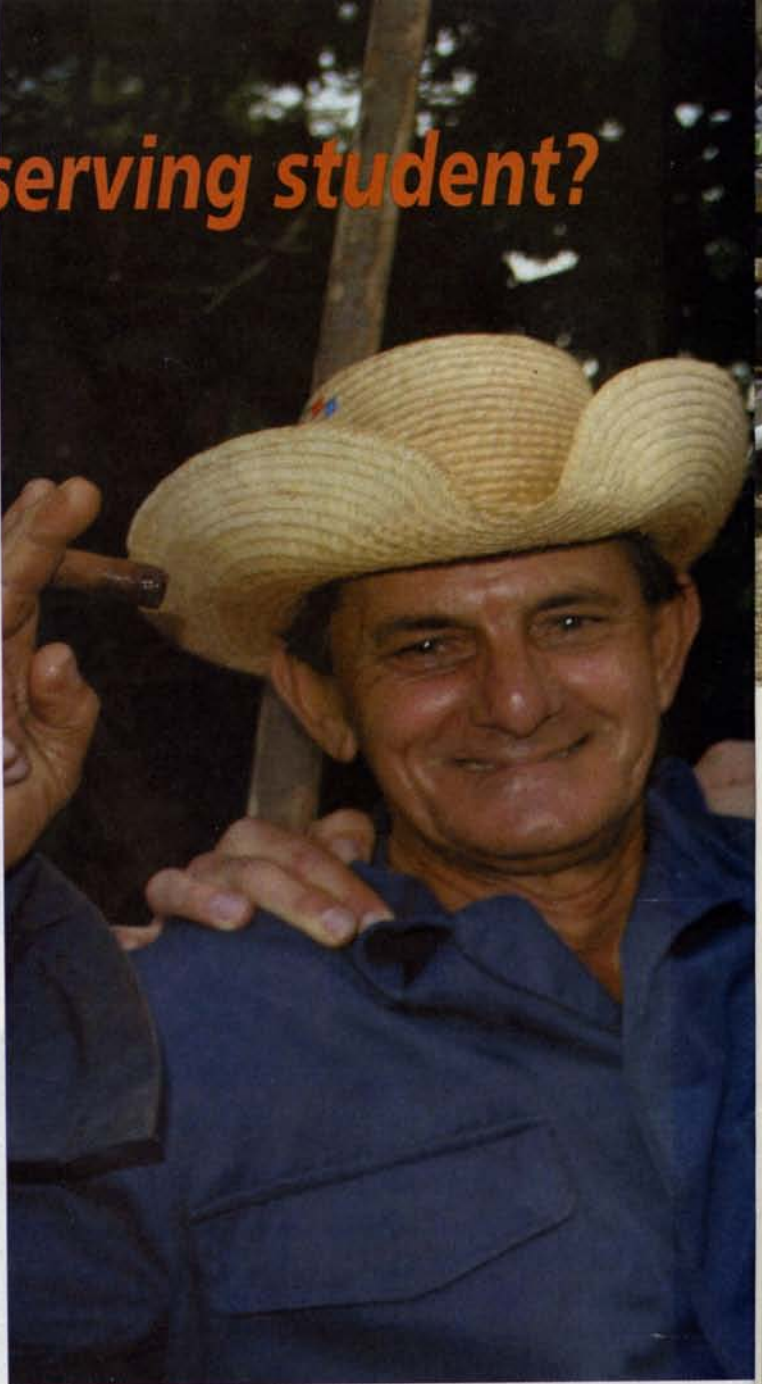
We learn about Cuba's use of botanical and medicinal herbs and are exposed to Cuba's social and cultural institutions.

The group also learns just how much key support is provided by Cuba's science infrastructure and visit vibrant examples of urban agriculture.

We spend time in some of Cuba's most important ecological reserves, and dip our toes in the Caribbean. And in the end, students understand what is happening here, why it is happening, and what lessons it offers to the rest of the world.

An Agrologist with 30+ years of professional practice in Canada and 10 years background in Cuba, I am delighted to again have the opportunity to accompany and teach this course.

The UBC course coordinator is Dr. Roxana Quinde, Global Resource Systems, Faculty of Land and Food Systems, University of British Columbia. Full transfer credits are available for students enrolled in Canadian universities, it can also be taken as an audited course (not for credit). Under-30 graduates of agricultural degree or diploma programs who are actively farming are more than welcome. For full details, go to [www.theholmteam.ca](http://www.theholmteam.ca) and follow the



links.

Why Cuba? Because Cuba leads the world in sustainable farming practices. In 1999, Cuba won the Swedish Parliament's prestigious Right Livelihood Award for global leadership in urban organic agriculture. In 2006, Cuba was the only nation to meet the World Wildlife Fund's definition of a sustainable society based on ecological footprint and social development indices.

And what makes Cuba so remarkable (and inspiring!) is that these successes were achieved in only one decade.

Prior to the early 1990's, Cuba's agriculture was characterized by large-scale monoculture.

With one of the highest ratios of tractors to farmland in the world, Cuba had fully embraced the so-called "green revolution" model, selling sugar, citrus and tobacco to the former Soviet Union in exchange for the rest of the goods the country needed.

Yet when crisis intervened (collapse of the Soviet Union and with it an abrupt loss of farm inputs such as chemicals, machinery, gasoline, feed grains, etc.), Cuba managed to reinvent herself, becoming





**A Cuban tobacco farmer, cigar in hand, poses with students Spencer Bailey (center) and John Hart. The group toured farmer cooperatives across the country, seeing first hand examples of sustainability in practice from composting to intercropping.**

in one decade — virtually overnight — a world leader is organic agriculture and urban agriculture.

Today, Cuban farmers are highly respected members of society earning more than doctors and lawyers. Seventy per cent of Cuba's farms are private cooperatives. Farmers have constitutional rights to all the support the state can give them to make their land productive, including agricultural extension to die for. Small CREE's (Centers for the Production of Entomophages and Entomopathogens, insects and pathogens that attack economic pests) dot the countryside, providing farmers with biological pest management alternatives to chemicals.

How was this possible? What lessons does Cuba offer for other Latin American Countries? What lessons does Cuba offer for Canada? In this three-week course, students visit Cuba's farms, agricultural universities, research stations and urban agriculture centres to find out for themselves.

As a bonus, we will also visit our award-winning cooperative dairy project being developed by Canadian and Cuban farmers in Havana province. Based on solar powered fencing, rotational pastures, on farm ration production and hand rearing of calves, Enhancing Sustainable Dairy Production Capacity in Cuba just won the 2007 AMEC Award for Sustainable Development and/or Protection of the Environment at the 15<sup>th</sup> Annual Awards for International Cooperation. More information on our dairy project is also posted at [www.theholmteam.ca](http://www.theholmteam.ca). If you know a deserving student who should be along with us on that bus, contact me (email [wendy@theholmteam.ca](mailto:wendy@theholmteam.ca) or phone 604-947-2893) for more information or speak directly to Dr. Roxana Quinde, Coordinator, Global Partnerships, Faculty of Agricultural Sciences, University of British Columbia, via email [quinde@interchange.ubc.ca](mailto:quinde@interchange.ubc.ca) or by phone at 604 822-0181.

This is an opportunity not to be missed! Happy New Year to all!