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"GROWING COMMUNITIES, FOSTERING THROUGH INNOVATION"
YOUNG PROFESSIONALS IN LOCAL DEVELOPMENT

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Discovering each other

IS HAPPENING: DAG JØRUND LØNNING

1. You are the Rector of the Norwegian University College for Agriculture and Rural Development. But your first studies weren't in agriculture. What made you turn your attention towards this field of activity?

I graduated in 1994 with a degree in Social Anthropology, and started out my academic career working in the fields of international development and human rights in the Middle East. A combination of my growing interest in rural/agricultural development and lots of frustration relating to lack of progress in the human rights field made me gradually change my research and activity focus. I have always been action- and development-oriented, and have seen many concrete positive results from my work on rural development over the last 15 years. In this sense, I haven't regretted a single day: working together with rural people in creating new rural futures has been both exciting and productive. In this period I have finished a doctor of philosophy theses on rural innovation (2007), and written numerous reports, articles as well as 10 books.

2. Your institution offers a broad range of courses in agriculture and rural/regional development having as a prime goal "viable and innovative rural communities". What current projects exist towards accomplishing this goal?

We have about 15 ongoing R&D projects within this field, and we came out as – according to the Ministry of Education's criteria – the most "relevant" Norwegian higher education institution last year.



Our projects cover fields like landscape resources for development, strategies to increase rural immigration, different forms of agricultural innovation and rural tourism. We also do a lot of work on participatory methodologies for rural development. Our philosophy is to offer our students research based education. All our lecturers are themselves involved in R&D projects, and we also try to include our students in the project work.

3. As the Rector of a higher education institution in agriculture and rural development, you are facing each day by the issue of engaging young people in agriculture. Are young people interested in this field? How could they become more interested?

Young people are interested in agriculture, but not necessarily in traditional forms focusing on mass production. In Norway we see a lack of interest in studying topics like standard agricultural economics or animal husbandry, but a growing interest in rural innovation and development. This appears to be happening all over Europe. Much of this has to do with young people's focus on following one's interests and engagement. Rural development is more focused on community, collaboration and gives more room for individual creativity. Traditional agriculture is seen more as standardized and – perhaps even more important – a solitary occupation. This is a great challenge, and

integrating agriculture into the rural development fold will be important in the future. Farmers need to be told that what they do is important! Please consider supporting the efforts.

4. A recent study done by YPARD showed that young graduated from agriculture higher education lack certain skills required on the job market. The study shows that soft skills that the most essential that would need to be developed further. How could these be integrated into the present higher education curricula? Amount EUR

In our institution we have seen this, and have put primary emphasis on developing skills like "mastery of change", "collaboration in teams", "ability to instigate development for development", "communication skills" and "action competence". In an age where human resources are the primary to instigate development these are essential skills and should be taught at all European higher education institutions!



5. What would be your advice to a young person that is trying today to decide to which university to apply for? How should a person decide the career path on which to walk?

Oh, these are big questions! The primary, I think, is to follow one's engagement and interests also when it comes to choosing education. Particularly in the rural field, interested and engaged youth are essential for the future of rural Europe. We rural dwellers need to give a new generation of creative youth freedom to use our common resources in new ways and in alignment with new trends and engagements. This is vital!