

Thursday, Feb. 07, 2013

## Austrian Alps Mountain Farmer to Inaugural Professor



Professor Paul Grossl (right) with USU Executive Vice President and Provost Raymond T. Coward. Professor Grossl presented an Inaugural Professor Lecture Jan. 23.



An Austrian town located in the Carinthian-Styrian Alps. USU professor Paul Grossl spent summers during his high school years working as a farmer, high in the Austrian Carinthian-Styrian Alps.

Utah State University biogeochemist professor Paul Grossl spent his summers during his high school years working as a farmer, high in the Austrian Carinthian-Styrian Alps.

“That experience gave me a direction in life, I knew I wanted to be outdoors working with agriculture and forestry,” said Grossl.

These mountain farms are ancient, isolated farms with fragile terrain, some dating back 2,000 years. Grossl worked on a more recent farm, founded in 1515.

“It began to click in my head the process of sustainability; the ability to manage lands in sustainable ways to create worth over a long period of time,” said Grossl.

Grossl gave his Inaugural Lecture Series presentation Jan. 23, the fifth lecture of this academic year’s installment. His lecture, “*A Middle-Ground Approach Toward Professorship and Beyond*,” described his roots and path to USU.

“I was always in the middle growing up. I am a middle child, was raised in two different countries and settings, urban and rural,” said Grossl.

After completing school in Illinois and Austria, Grossl enrolled in the forestry undergraduate program at the University of Illinois, and

discovered his passion for soil during his junior year after taking a required soil science class.

“It brought everything together, chemistry, biology and environmental science,” he said.

Grossl completed his master’s from University of Minnesota, and doctorate at Montana State University. Grossl took a position as an assistant professor of biogeochemistry with Utah State in 1994. He is a faculty member in the Plants, Soils and Climate Department in the College of Agriculture.

“I was targeting the West because I wanted two things, the opportunity to be outdoors and to be near mountains,” said Grossl. “Utah State has provided much more than that.”

Grossl is currently researching soil reclamation in the environment, but has shifted more attention to teaching and engaging students about soil and environmental science issues.

“I want to develop my courses so students don’t see it as a required course, but as an enjoyable learning experience,” said Grossl.

While at USU, Grossl is recognized for his research with arsenic reactions in the environment. His work has been cited multiple times, and the data was used to develop systems to remove arsenic from drinking water in third world countries.

“During the time of our research there was the largest mass poisoning in human history occurring in Bangladesh from arsenic contamination in the water wells,” Grossl said. “Our papers came out with parameters that helped engineers develop affordable systems to bring clean water to remote areas.”

Grossl came into USU with little teaching experience, but has grown a passion for communicating his experiences to students in helping them learn.

“I want people to gain an appreciation for soil, and see its value as a precious natural resource that needs to be preserved rather than abused as

a short-term profitable but non-sustainable means to a destructive end,” said Grossl.

***Related links:***

[USU Department of Plants, Soils and Climate](#)

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