For one month each year, associate professor and microbiologist Alan Bakalinsky finds himself in Italy. While his days are spent in labs, there is nothing he enjoys more than a long, slow Italian meal in the evenings, usually not beginning until 8 or 9 p.m.

In Italy, he explained, time is taken around food. Meals are the main event. It could be a huge plate of spaghetti, a zesty pizza, sweet gelato – maybe even all of the above – but it will be enjoyed and savored with friends.

One particular friendship with a visiting Italian Ph.D. student led to Bakalinsky’s fascination with Italy.

“He did most of his work in my lab,” Bakalinsky said. “My connection with Italy grew out of that friendship.”

During his many professional trips, Bakalinsky has made even more friendships and connections throughout the country. When Paul Dorres, Director of Student Services for the College of Agricultural Sciences, approached Bakalinsky about guiding a trip to Italy for students, he was thrilled to be able to share his experiences with students.

**Exploring World Agriculture**

Seventeen undergraduate students joined Bakalinsky and co-leader Giovanna Rosenlicht from the Department of Animal Sciences for an 18-day trip around Italy in September of 2012 as part of the Exploring World Agriculture Program.

Dorres said the program has been going on for about 20 years, each year involving a different department and location based on where professors have connections.

“The educational tours engage students in learning about how functions of their discipline are approached differently across the globe,” Dorres said.

Bakalinsky’s food-science-focused trip began in the north near Venice, continued to the island Sardinia and finished in Rome.
Because of Bakalinsky’s professional connections, the students were able to visit sights regular tourists don’t.

“We were at the wineries during harvest,” Bakalinsky said. “It wasn’t ideal, but they made time for us, even though they were busy working.”

**Hands-on Food Science Experience**

Wineries were on the itinerary as well as breweries, factories and farms. The trip began in the north near Conegliano. There, the students learned about wine production practices in the area and visited cheese, coffee and grappa factories. They experienced the unique ecology of the area by boat and viewed the ruins of ancient Roman settlements.

Oregon State students met and visited with students at the University of Sassari. They visited a cork factory, learning the ins and outs of a unique part of the wine industry.

Bakalinsky said students were shocked when their guide at a mussel factory pulled raw mussels from the water and had a snack.

“We decided to pass on that,” he said, laughing.

In the South Sardegna area the group toured a brewery and saw even more ruins. Evenings were sometimes free, and Bakalinsky said he wishes the students had more time to enjoy their beautiful surroundings and the clear-watered beaches.

“After the day’s activities it was a race to see who could get into the water first,” he said.

The trip finished with six days in Rome where students saw more farms as well as the typical tourist attractions.

“I felt like I was taking these students into a part of my world,” he explained. “I wanted to share that pleasure with them.”

**On the Farm**

Bakalinsky has fond memories of one farm the group visited up north: a sheep farm that relies on community support to function. In return, supporters are offered lamb meat, wool, milk and cheese.

“A lot of the students have farming backgrounds, so they were immediately at home,” he said. “We got to make ricotta from the sheep’s milk and look at all the animals.”

The students were treated to lunch as well. Throughout all the meals on the trip, they learned the Italian way of doing things.

“In this country, so often, we’re running,” Bakalinsky said. “The students saw that a whole evening can be devoted to one meal. It’s not a fuel stop to get through so you can go on to something else.”

The group often dined together, enjoying local favorites, and Bakalinsky was pleased to watch them enjoy.

**A Student Perspective**

Sophomore Food Science Major, Julia Cresto, has traveled a bit and even been to Italy once before, but on this trip she experienced things she had never even thought of before.

She fondly remembers one of the family wineries the group visited on the trip.

“The wine that they made was made from yeast that was indigenous to the island and produced a very sweet high alcohol content wine, that was almost like a brandy,” she said. “This was different from any type of wine that we had seen while on our trip and it intrigued me very much.”

In fact, Cresto said she fell in love with wine on the trip.

“I used to be just food science option but the trip to Italy made me change my focus from food processing to wine,” she said. “The trip overall has made me more excited about my major and influenced me to get more involved in the food science department.”

For more information about the Exploring World Agriculture, and for information about future trips, contact Paul Dorres, paul.dorres@oregonstate.edu.