

DECT3205_OUR GLOBAL SOCIETY AND AGROECOLOGY

Course Syllabus

I. **Course Code:** DECT3205
Course Title: Our Global Society and Agroecology

Number of Credits: 3 credits

Instructor's name	NECI Email
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II. **Course Overview**

This course critically examines the global agroecological food system. We will follow the commodity chain of food, beginning with food production and agriculture; move on to processing, transport and marketing; and then finally to the politics of food consumption.

This course does *not* aim merely to describe the current food system, nor does it adopt a neutral or 'objective' stance on it. Rather, the course puts forth a particular argument: it begins from the premise that the current globalized, industrial agro-food system creates profound problems for environmental degradation, animal welfare, worker safety, and consumer health. Moreover, the course takes as axiomatic that agro-food systems should promote social justice and environmental sustainability. As such, I will not attempt to provide 'both sides' of the food system story – we will take a critical stance throughout. (For the other side, you merely have to turn on the TV, go to the supermarket, or eat at McDonalds. We are inundated with this side of the story every day, often without even being aware of it.) The goals of this course, then, are rather simple: to provide a clearer, more critical understanding of the global agro-food system, and to explore various alternatives and their viability.

The course will involve some field trips and 'field assignments' intended to get you out into the community, to examine agroecological food issues in and around Vermont. Vermont is a laboratory for food issues. It is one of the most important agricultural regions in the country and is dominated by relatively small family farms and diverse production systems that include apples, honey, corn, hay, greenhouse & nursery products, maple syrup, fruits and vegetables, dairy products, eggs and fiber products. The University of Vermont is the state's land-grant institution, and one of the leading agricultural research centers in the country. Regional farmer's market attracts a diversity of people from New England (both vendors and customers), and there are a large number of alternative food networks such as Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs, community gardens, food justice organizations and Coops.

But Vermont is also relatively poor: food insecurity is common and many rely on food assistance on a regular basis. Vermont's obesity rates was 28.6% of the population in 2013 and rising, and is closely tied to poor nutrition. In the class, we will explore these issues on a first-hand basis, in the context of broader national and international processes and relationships.

III. Required Texts

There are two required texts for this class:

- *Hungry for Profit: The Agribusiness Threat to Farmers, Food and the Environment*, edited by Fred Magdoff, John Bellamy Foster, and Frederick H. Buttel (Monthly Review Press, I, 2000) ("**Hungry**" in course schedule, below)
- *The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals* (Penguin Press, New York, 2006) ("**Omnivore**" in course schedule, below)

In addition, there will be a number of required readings available on MOODLE. These are labeled in *italics* in the course schedule, below, listed by author's last name and year of publication. Readings appear on MOODLE in the order in which you are to read them.

The reading load for this course is moderate to high. You are expected to keep up with readings each week, so plan to spend several hours a week reading. We will discuss the readings in class, and they will be incorporated into lectures. Your ability to discuss the readings thoughtfully will be assessed as part of your participation grade (see below).

IV. Course Requirements and Grading

There are no exams in this class. Instead, you will have four 500-word individual writing assignments, one larger research paper (and presentation), one readings introduction and a book review essay. The research paper is due at the end of the semester, and will be focused on individual choice, to be decided in class. Of the writing assignments, two are 'field assignments,' for which you will be required to get out into the community and observe aspects of the food system first hand. The other two assignments involve mapping aspects of the food system – the ingredients and commodity chain of a meal and the geography of hunger (either regionally or globally). You will receive detailed instructions for each assignment.

In addition, you will be responsible for reading a book of your choice (chosen from a list of options) and writing a 1200-word critical review of it. Your review will be due toward the end of the semester and should place the book in the context of the themes we cover in the class. You will receive a list of possible books to choose from, along with instructions and samples of academic book reviews.

Finally, once during the semester, you will be responsible for introducing the week's readings in class and presenting a short list of questions and/or critiques of the readings. Your summary points and questions should be submitted and are worth 25 points.

V. Grades:

⊙ Individual writing assignments: (4 x 50 points)	=	200 points
⊙ Book review	=	100 points
⊙ Group research paper	=	75 points
⊙ Readings introduction and questions	=	25 points
⊙ Class participation (discussion and found objects)	=	50 points

Total = 450 points

IV. Plagiarism and Academic Honesty

Plagiarism on course assignments is a serious offense, and is not acceptable. The easiest way to think of plagiarism is the use of other peoples' ideas or words without proper citation.

Plagiarism is a very serious breach of academic honesty, and will not be tolerated in this class.

The first time a student is found to be plagiarizing, s/he will automatically receive a score of 0 for the plagiarized assignment. If the student is caught plagiarizing a second time, s/he will automatically receive an F for the course. There will be no exceptions.

V. Disability-Related Accommodations

Students who are in need of disability-related academic accommodations must register with Anne Connor of The Learning Center. Accommodations, such as exam administration, are not provided retroactively; therefore, planning for accommodations as early as possible is necessary.

VI. Cell Phones and Laptops

Please be sure that cell phones are turned off or silenced *before* coming to class. Text messaging during class will not be tolerated. Use of laptops during class for any purpose other than note taking is not acceptable. If I see you using an electronic device inappropriately in class, I will deduct 10 points from your overall grade. I may or may not notify you. Persons repeatedly using electronic devices for inappropriate purposes during class will be asked to leave.

VII. COURSE SCHEDULE

Date	Topic	Readings
<i>Part I</i>		
<i>Agrarian Questions: Farming Systems, Labor and Land</i>		
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Week 1		
	Course introduction: Food as Politics, Food as Geography	<i>Pollan 2008</i>
	Film: 'Food Inc.' or 'A Place at the Table'	Omnivore – Intro
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Week 2		
	Peasant farming & agrarian questions	Hungry – Overview, Chap. 8
	The rise of industrial farming	Omnivore – Chaps. 1-2 Hungry – Chap. 4
	** Also read: 'Getting real about the high cost of cheap food,' (<i>Time magazine</i>) www.time.com/time/health/article/0,8599,1917458,00.html	
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Week 3		
	Agricultural policies and their implications	<i>Cook 2004 – Ch. 5-6</i> <i>Manning 2004</i>
	Farm work and farm workers	Hungry – Chap. 9 <i>Rodriguez et al. 2009</i>
	** <i>Mapping Assignment 1:</i> <i>The geography of dinner (due in class)**</i>	<i>Read: Cook et al. 2004</i> <i>('Follow the thing: papaya')</i>

Week 4

GMOs: OMG!	<i>Fitting 2006</i>
From Green Revolution to Gene Revolution	<i>Altieri 2001</i>
Field trip: Hunger Mountain Food Co-op and/or Stowe Farmer's Market	<i>Mariola 2008</i>

Week 5

Seafood and its discontents	<i>Jackson 2008</i>
**Also read: 'Tuna's end,' (<i>New York Times Magazine</i>) www.nytimes.com/2010/06/27/magazine/27Tuna-t.html	
The ones that didn't get away: The collapse of the world's fisheries	<i>Film: 'End of the Line'</i>
**Read: 'Aquacalypse now: the end of fish' (<i>The New Republic</i>) www.tnr.com/article/environment-energy/aquacalypse-now	

Week 6

Debating organic agriculture	Omnivore – Chap. 8-9
Agrarian movements and food justice	<i>Levkoe 2006</i>
**Also, read through: www.justfood.org/food-justice and 'The food justice movement: trying to break the food chains' (<i>Gotham Gazette</i>) www.gothamgazette.com/article/communitydevelopment/20031218/20/808	
Field Assignment 1: Farmer's market write-up (due in class)	Read: Griffin & Frongillo (2003)

Part II

Middle Men (and Women): The Making of the Global Food System

Week 7

Corporate consolidation 1: The global food system	Omnivore – Chap. 5
Corporate consolidation 2: Rise of the food giants	Hungry – Chaps. 3 & 6

Week 8

Food aid and development policies **Book Review Essay Due in Class**	<i>Cook 2004 – Chap. 12</i>
‘Free trade’ vs. fair trade Film: “ <i>Life and Debt</i> ”	Hungry – Chap. 7

Week 9

CAFOs and the meat industry	Omnivore – Chap. 4, 17
Fast food nation	<i>Schlosser 2001 – Chap. 5, 6, 7</i>

Week 10

Supermarkets and super marketing	<i>Patel 2007</i> <i>Konefal et al. 2005</i>
Food safety and health issues 1: Food scares **Also read: www.nytimes.com/2009/10/04/health/04meat.html	<i>Schlosser 2001 – Chap. 8-9</i>
Field Assignment 2: Supermarket scavenger hunt (due in class)	

Part III:

You Are What (and Where) you Eat: Hunger, Health, and the Politics of Consumption

Week 11

Food safety and health issues 2: Omnivore – Chap. 6 Obesity and body image

*** Also read: www.nytimes.com/2010/08/13/business/13veggies.html*

No class today – work on mapping assignment

Week 12

Hunger and food insecurity

NACLA 2009

Hungry – Chap. 11

Hunger and food insecurity

Hillengas 2010

Week 13

Food as commodity, food as identity

Lind and Barham 2004

Benson and Fischer 2007

*****Mapping Assignment 2: Mapping hunger (due in class)*****

Week 14

Food justice revisited

Omnivore – Chap. 20

Williams 2005

Presentations

Week 15

Presentations

Presentations

VIII. Bibliography

- Altieri, Miguel A. 2001. *Genetic Engineering in Agriculture: The Myths, Environmental Risks, and Alternatives*. Oakland: Food First.
- Benson, Peter and Edward F. Fischer 2007. Broccoli and desire. *Antipode*, 39(5): 800-820.
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- Griffin, Mathew R. and Edward A. Frongillo 2003. Experiences and perspectives of farmers from Upstate New York farmers' markets. *Agriculture and Human Values*, 20: 189-203.
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- Levkoe, Charles Z. 2006. Learning democracy through food justice movements. *Agriculture and Human Values*, 23: 89-98.
- Lind, David and Elizabeth Barham 2004. The social life of the tortilla: Food, cultural politics, and contested commodification. *Agriculture and Human Values* , 21: 47-60.
- Magdoff, Fred, John Bellamy Foster, and Frederick H. Buttel (eds.) 2000. *Hungry for Profit: The Agribusiness Threat to Farmers, Food and the Environment*. Monthly Review Press, New York.
- Manning, Richard 2004. The oil we eat: Following the food chain back to Iraq. *Harper's Magazine*, February, pp. 37-45.
- Mariola, Matthew J. 2008. The local industrial complex? Questioning the link between local foods and energy use. *Agriculture and Human Values*, 25: 193-196.
- NACLA 2009. Food crisis in the Americas (various articles). *NACLA Report on the Americas*, 42(3): 15-33.

Patel, Raj 2007. *Stuffed and Starved: The Hidden Battle for the World Food System*. Melville House Publishing, Brooklyn.

Pollan, Michael 2006. *The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals*. Penguin Press, New York

Pollan, Michael 2008. Farmer in chief. *New York Times Magazine*, 9 October.

Rodriguez, Arturo, Alexa Delwiche and Sheheryar Kaoosji 2009. Cheap food: Workers pay the price. In *Food, Inc.: How Industrial Food is Making Us Sicker, Fatter and Poorer – and What You can do about it*. Public Affairs/Perseus Books, New York.

Schlosser, Eric 2001. *Fast Food Nation: the Dark Side of the All-American Meal*. Houghton-Mifflin, Boston.

Williams, Orrin 2005. Food and justice: The critical link to healthy communities. In David Naguib Pellow and Robert J. Brulle (eds.), *Power, Justice and the Environment: A Critical Appraisal of the Environmental Justice Movement*. The MIT Press, pp. 117-130.