



# Eating a global environment: Critical perspectives of agrofood systems in a globalizing world

ENST 23610

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2017

This topics course looks at questions about the human dimensions of the globalization and localization of food production. Drawing sociological theories of labor, agricultural economies, treadmills of production and consumption, and race, class, and food access into popular notions of taste, nutrition, and the “good farmer,” this course aims to contemplate the promise and peril of contemporary agrofood systems in a globalizing world. We will probe questions such as: what are the technological, timing, labor, and immigration requirements to harvest strawberries in California? How does getting green beans from Kenya reproduce colonialism? Who actually eats organic, local foods, and why? What is limiting certain peoples’ access to “good food”? Who wins and who loses when our food comes from the farm next-door or other countries?

This course centers on the history and future of food, agriculture, and human relationships in the United States. We will bring social scientific theory to bear on a series of case studies centering on the United States and its relationships with other places through food and agriculture. Students will engage with core theoretical and case study readings through short and long-form writing assignments, discussion leadership, and participation.

We will be guided by the perspective that social and environmental conflicts are embedded in material needs, which, in turn, are in dialogue with ideological values. How and what we eat are no exception. The course will be animated by the following four themes:

- 1) Material and ideological dialogue of food, agriculture, and agrarianism.
- 2) Contemporary challenges of traditional, family farming.
- 3) Causes and consequences of agricultural globalization.
- 4) The promise and challenge of alternative food systems.

The problems we will confront throughout this course are complex and daunting, defying simple, ‘silver bullet’ solutions. Students should be prepared to grapple with, consider, and deliberate multiple and often conflicting perspectives about the consumption and production of food in the 21st century.

## Course details

Lecture: MW 10:30-11:50

Room:

Office:

Office Hours: 12pm-1pm Mondays and by appointment

Email:

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## Assignments and grading

Your grade for this course will be based on the following:

- ◆ 20% Attendance and participation
- ◆ 20% Leading discussion
- ◆ 30% Reading reflections
- ◆ 30% Final essay



### 1. **Attendance and Participation (20%)**

Class is most meaningful with your consistent participation and attendance. By sharing your thoughts and ideas in small- and large-group discussions, you can help each other think critically and engage the material. There will be multiple ways for you to participate—from small group discussions to in-class writing assignments to debates. If your ability to regularly attend or participate fully in class will be limited, please come talk to me during office hours early in the quarter.

**A. Attendance (10%):** Good attendance means showing up a few minutes before class starts to get settled and packing up to leave after the conclusion of class. If you are more than 10 minutes late, you will not receive credit for attendance.

You may miss 1 class with no grade penalty (with the exception of your seminar-leading day). Each subsequent missed day will lower your attendance grade by one letter (i.e. 2 missed classes: B, 3 missed classes: C, etc.)

**B. Participation (10%):** You are required to share your thoughts and ideas in discussion, demonstrating that you have been mindful about the readings, as well as comments made by me and your peers. By engaging in discussion, you help each other think critically. I will measure two forms of participation:

**Oral Participation:** I recognize that due to background and personality, students have different abilities to be vocal in class. You will not be penalized simply for being a quiet person. However, make your best effort to make thoughtful, relevant contributions at each class session.

**Written Participation:** Another component of participation are written reactions. I value constructive and generative feedback about course material, structure, my teaching style, things your peers have said, or your learning style. Please turn in 5-10 sentences to me at the end of each class meeting. Tell me things like:

- What did you learn?
- Was there something you didn't understand?
- Do you want to spend more time on something?
- Were you upset or offended by anything?

This is not simply a summary of what happened in class. Think of it as a weekly evaluation of class and a demonstration of your engagement.

**Here is a breakdown of the qualitative “participation” measure:**

- You show up, but say nothing and write little: C
- You show up, say some note-worthy things, but write little: B
- You show up, say nothing, but write engaging comments: B
- You show up and consistently make insightful oral and written comments: A

Good participation means that you consistently demonstrate thoughtful and thorough engagement with your classmates, your instructor, and the reading materials. This doesn't mean you have to know everything. I expect that you are present, alert, and paying attention.

**2. Leading discussion** (20% of your total grade): Once during the quarter, you will lead our class in a 20-minute discussion of one of the assigned readings. This includes providing a brief overview of the intention of the text, the author and their context, and the central debates engaged by that text. Bring in contemporary examples, counter-points, poetry, short film clips, or critical questions.

**3. Reading reflections** (30% of your total grade, 6% each): Five times this quarter, you will write a brief analysis of the central argument(s) in the assigned readings. These assignments are critical examinations (not summaries) of our texts. Tease apart some question about the readings for that week; probe assumptions buried in it; draw out the main points and frame important questions. The goal of these assignments is to assist you in critically engaging with the readings before coming to class, and to improve your short-form argumentation and writing skills.

Each essay must be between 500 and 750 words, not including references and header; 2-3 pages, double-spaced. Submit these properly formatted documents (see bottom of p. 3) to the appropriate week's assignment on Canvas. These are due by *midnight* on Sundays of the week that includes the readings of interest. Late reading reflections will not be accepted.

You may select which five days to complete these reading reflections, with one exception: everyone must write a reflection for April 3rd, in Week 2; a reading reflection for week 10 must draw from one of the optional readings available on Canvas. You may write a sixth reflection linking a field observation with theory (instructions will be given by week 5). This 6th essay is optional. Your best five grades for these Reading Reflections will be counted. This means you have the option of either dropping the lowest grade or writing only five reflections.

**4. Final essay** (30% of your total grade): Each student must turn in a final written project, 10-12 pages long, double-spaced. Typically, these papers take one of two forms: a theoretical discussion that incorporates at least two central topics discussed in class; or a research paper that uses an ongoing substantive debate (case study) in agrofoods/human-environmental relationships to illustrate or challenge key theoretical concepts learned in class. More information will be provided at a later date.

Paper steps and deadlines:

- Proposed topic (pass/fail) (Week 3 - April 12)
- First polished draft 15% (Week 7 - May 10)
- Peer review (pass/fail) (Week 8 - May 17)
- Final paper 15% (Week 11 (finals week) - June 5)

### **Formatting for every written assignment**

Points will be deducted for papers that do not conform to these rules:

- Page/ word-count minimum and maximum respected
- Double-spaced
- 12-point, Times New Roman font
- 1" margins
- Page numbers
- Include your name, class, date, and assignment title in the top left corner of the assignment
- Submit to word (.doc) formatted papers to Canvas's Dropbox for this course *before the class session in which they are due*; submissions during or after the class session will not be accepted.
- Cite meticulously, correctly, and consistently. I suggest the American Sociological Association (ASA) style guide ([http://www.asanet.org/cs/root/topnav/sociology\\_depts/quick\\_style\\_guide](http://www.asanet.org/cs/root/topnav/sociology_depts/quick_style_guide)), but you may use your preferred style.

**Technology:** Cell phones and earbuds must be stowed in your bag or pocket before you sit down. You may use your laptop or tablet to access readings. All notes should be taken by hand. If you observe you attending to something other than our class, while in class, you will lose your attendance score for the day. If your body is present, your brain must be present as well.

**Readings:** You need to purchase two books:

- Bell, Michael. 2004. *Farming For Us All: Practical Agriculture and the Cultivation of Sustainability*. Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Freidberg, Susanne. *French Beans and Food Scares: Culture and Commerce in an Anxious Age*. NY: Oxford Univ. Press, 2004.

All other readings will be available via PDF on the course website. It is your responsibility to read and digest the assignments **before** class; each has been handpicked for the week assigned to provide foundational information or spark discussion. Plan to put in 3-5 hours each week to do the course readings. Reading is necessary for your meaningful class participation.

**Plagiarism and academic honesty:** I understand that as the quarter progresses, you will be juggling multiple class assignments, studying for exams, and in many cases, pursuing part-time work and campus/community activism. Avoid cutting corners and, especially, avoid any type of behavior that can be interpreted as plagiarism and academic misconduct (such as copying and pasting material from the internet without proper citation). Any form of cheating or plagiarism is absolutely unacceptable and intolerable in this class and in UChicago. Lack of knowledge regarding these guidelines will NOT be accepted as an excuse. If you have questions about citation and plagiarism specifically, you must consult the hand-out “Acknowledging Sources,” available at the Canvas website for this course and in the reader.

#### **Accommodations**

It is the intention of the University of Chicago to work toward full compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), to make facilities and instructional programs accessible to all people, and to provide reasonable accommodations according to the law. Please see me within the first two weeks of the quarter to discuss special arrangements that may be needed to help you succeed in this course.

If you are struggling with the course, regardless of “formal” paperwork, I invite you to consult with me as soon as you can so we can design a solution that will help you be successful in the class.

#### **Communicating with me**

My goal is to set you up for success and learning in this class. Please attend my weekly office hours, talk to me before or after class, or schedule a one-on-one meeting with me via Canvas.

#### **Regrading policy**

I take grading very seriously and hence, requests for an assignment to be re-graded must be done in hardcopy, no sooner than one week nor later than two weeks after grade results are handed back for an assignment. In this request, you must detail compelling reasons for why the letter grade was unfairly assigned. I will respond to you in writing. If I accept a re-do on an assignment, remember that your original grade can decline.

***I will provide details on content and specific grading criteria with each assignment.***

You will receive grades out of 100 points. The grading scale is:

A=94-100, AB=88-93, B=83-87, BC=78-82, C=70-77, D=60-69, F=59% or below.

## Our ambiance

**1. Food access, capitalism, inequalities...** contentious issues outside the classroom. But inside our classroom, we have the unique opportunity to redesign how we engage in discourse about these important topics. We must take up the challenge to engage each other in thoughtful, thought-provoking conversation about the social origins of communities, “nature,” and conflicts between the two. What an opportunity to develop skills in democratic, articulate, and well-reasoned talking and listening! So, together, let us build a community of respectful scholars by abiding by the following rules:

- **Be willing to listen to and reflect on opinions you disagree with.** Try to understand why someone believes what they do. Hold yourself open to the possibility that you might change your mind. Respect people even when you are sure they are wrong. Keep an open mind what another classmate says.
- **This is a “correctness-free” space.** Everyone in the class is free to express opinions and ask questions without fear of censure from classmates. You should express your opinions, even if you think that none of your classmates will agree. If someone says something that you find offensive, react to the comment (not the person) by asking her to first clarify what she said. Pose counterarguments to challenge the assertion or explain why the remark was offensive to you.
- **Learn to distinguish types of factual claims.** Do express your opinions, but build them upon solid evidence. Be aware of the difference between anecdotal evidence and generalizable facts. As the quarter goes on, draw on readings from the course and contemporary examples to give substance to your argument.
- **Be sensitive to minority/majority dynamics.** People who are members of racial/ethnic minorities or who hold minority opinions can feel particularly vulnerable in some contexts. Let me know if you are worried about class dynamics.
- **Recognize diversity** as a contribution to discussion. Recognize that we all have a different personal history and this varies by socioeconomic background, sexual orientation, gender, ethnicity, and ability/disability.
- **Pose questions** to your classmates. All of you are responsible for having good discussions. Do not merely look at and talk to me in group discussions. Use each other’s names, and make references to your colleagues comments in discussion.
- **Use your sociological imagination.** Remember how it is not just about you, but about the structure of society. Reassess your place in the society. Contribute to discussions that emphasize the connections among history, social structure, and personal biography.
- **Treat everyone in class with respect.** Name-calling, excessive interrupting, and domination of discussion are not appropriate and will be addressed if they become problems. They will also have a significant, negative impact on the whole of your participation and attendance grade.

## **2. Suggestions for fruitful discussion (and writing)**

- Refer to specific passages in the text
- Try to respond to the person who spoke right before you. Make this a conversation.
- If you want to say something that isn’t directly related, raise 2 fingers, and I will put you in the queue.
- Try to be succinct in your remarks.
- When asking a question, think about what evidence someone could bring to bear in answering it.

Date	Topic	Texts and due dates:
Week 1 March 27	Introduction to the course	<i>What is a food system? Why might a social scientific examination of the past, present, and future of our food system be interesting?</i>
1 March 29	Challenges of contemporary agrofoods systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Walker, M., 2012. "Contemporary Agrarianism: A Reality Check." <i>Agric. Hist.</i> 86, pp. 1–25.</li> <li>• Grimes, J. 2006. "Agro-Food System," 2pp, in <i>Encyclopedia of Human Geography</i>, edited by Barney Warf, 7. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.</li> <li>• Merrett, C. D. 2006. "Agriculture, Industrialized," 2pp, in <i>Encyclopedia of Human Geography</i>.</li> <li>• Farming First, 2012. "With a billion people hungry, how can we feed the world?" <a href="https://farmingfirst.org/2012/02/with-a-billion-people-hungry-how-can-we-feed-the-world/">https://farmingfirst.org/2012/02/with-a-billion-people-hungry-how-can-we-feed-the-world/</a></li> </ul>
2 April 3	Agrofoods as consumption	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pollan, M. 2006. "Introduction," pp. 1-11, in <i>The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals</i>. New York: Penguin Press.</li> <li>• Warf, B. 2006. "Consumption, Geography and," 2 pp, in <i>Encyclopedia of Human Geography</i>.</li> <li>• *Berry, W. 1990 "The pleasures of eating," pp. 125-131 in <i>Our Sustainable Table...Essays</i>, Robert Clark (ed.), San Francisco, CA: North Point Press.</li> </ul>
2 April 5	Agrofoods as production	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reinhardt, N., Barlett, P., 1989. The Persistence of Family Farms in United States Agriculture. <i>Sociol. Ruralis</i> 29, pp. 203–225.</li> <li>• Bell, M. M. and L. Ashwood. 2015. "Money and Markets," pp. 78-106, in <i>An Invitation to Environmental Sociology</i>. 5th edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.</li> </ul>
3 April 10	Material realities of contemporary American agriculture.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bell M. M. 2004. Introduction, Intermezzo, and 'Economy and Security,' pp. 1-55, in <i>Farming For Us All: Practical Agriculture and the Cultivation of Sustainability</i>. Pennsylvania State University Press.</li> <li>• USDA ERS, 2017. "Large farms dominate," <a href="https://www.ers.usda.gov/amber-waves/2017/march/large-family-farms-continue-to-dominate-us-agricultural-production/">https://www.ers.usda.gov/amber-waves/2017/march/large-family-farms-continue-to-dominate-us-agricultural-production/</a></li> </ul>
3 April 12	Change in agriculture and rural life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• **Bell. 2004. 'Community and Environment,' and 'Farming the Self,' pp. 56-70, 91-122, in <i>Farming For Us All: Practical Agriculture and the Cultivation of Sustainability</i>.</li> </ul>
4 April 17	Bringing in workers: Global food systems at home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thomas, R. 1982. "Citizenship and Gender in Work Organization: Some Considerations for Theories of the Labor Process." <i>American Journal of Sociology</i>, 88. Pp. 86-112.</li> <li>• *Bauer, M. &amp; M. Ramirez. 2010. "Workplace Exploitation: Immigrant Women Powerless in the Face of Abuses," pp. 21-41, in <i>Injustice on Our Plates</i>, Southern Poverty Law Center, Montgomery, AL.</li> <li>• *Wuthnow, R. 2016. Introduction, "Neighbors," pp. 1-11, 59-62, in <i>In the Blood: Understanding America's Farm Families</i>. Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ.</li> </ul>
4 April 19	Moving food abroad: Global food systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• *Wuthnow, R. 2016. "Markets," pp. 163-184, in <i>In the Blood: Understanding America's Farm Families</i>.</li> <li>• McMichael, P., 2009. "A food regime analysis of the "world food crisis."" <i>Agric. Human Values</i> 26, 281–295.</li> </ul>

Date	Topic	Texts and due dates:
5 April 24	Global food systems: political structures and perceptions of risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Busch, L. and C. Bain. 2004. "New! Improved? The Transformation of the Global Agrifood System." <i>Rural Sociology</i>. 69(3):321-346.</li> <li>• Freidberg, S. 2004. <i>French Beans and Food Scares: Culture and Commerce in an Anxious Age</i>. NY: Oxford Univ. Press. Chapter 1, pp. 3-33.</li> </ul>
5 April 26	Global food systems: labor and neocolonialism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Freidberg, S. 2004. <i>French Beans and Food Scares: Culture and Commerce in an Anxious Age</i>. NY: Oxford Univ. Press, Chapters 2, 4, 6, &amp; 7.</li> </ul>
6 May 1	Global food systems and labor: who wins, who loses?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• *Collins, J. 2000. Tracing social relations in commodity chains: The case of grapes in Brazil. P. 97-107, <i>In Commodities and Globalization: Anthropological Perspectives</i>, Angelique Haugerud, M. Priscilla Stone, and Peter D. Little, eds. New York: Rowman &amp; Littlefield.</li> <li>• Patel-Campillo, A. (2012), The Gendered Production–Consumption Relation: Accounting for Employment and Socioeconomic Hierarchies in the Colombian Cut Flower Global Commodity Chain. <i>Sociologia Ruralis</i>, 52: 272–293.</li> </ul>
6 May 3	Resistance to the global food systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• *Summers, M. 2013. "Voting with More Than Your Fork: Reclaiming Food Citizenship." In <i>Reflection for Panel on Political Movements</i> at "Unstuck: Reviving the Movement of Social Justice, Human Dignity and the Environment." Ann Arbor, Michigan. Pp. 1-7.</li> <li>• Pollan, M. 2006. "Voting With Your Fork." <i>The New York Times "On the Table" Blog</i>.</li> </ul>
7 May 8	Alternative agriculture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Foley, J. 2011. "Can We Feed the World and Sustain the Planet?" <i>Scientific American</i>.</li> <li>• *Hendrickson, J., Kloppenburg, Jr., J., Stevenson, G.W., 1996. Coming in to the Foodshed. <i>Agric. Human Values</i> 13, pp. 33–42.</li> <li>• Guthman, J., 2004. <i>Agrarian dreams: The paradox of organic farming in California</i>. University of California Press, Berkeley. Chapter 1, pp 1-22.</li> </ul>
7 May 10	Growing "green": Organic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• *Guthman, J., 2004. <i>Agrarian dreams: The paradox of organic farming in California</i>. University of California Press, Berkeley. Chapters 2-3 (pgs. 23-60), Chapter 8 (pgs. 172-196)</li> <li>• Policy documents in Week 7 <i>Module</i>.</li> </ul>
8 May 15	Marketing "good": Fair Trade	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Raynolds, L. 2012. "Fair Trade: Social Regulation in Global Food Markets." <i>Journal of Rural Studies</i> 28: 3, pp 276-87.</li> <li>• *Jaffee, D., Kloppenburg, J., Monroy, M.B., 2004. "Bringing the "Moral Charge" Home: Fair Trade within the North and within the South." <i>Rural Sociol.</i> 69, 169–196.</li> <li>• Policy documents in Week 8 <i>Module</i>.</li> </ul>
8 May 17	Rooted in place: The dilemmas of localization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• *DeLind, L.B. 2011. "Are Local Food and the Local Food Movement Taking us Where We Want to Go? Or Are We Hitching Our Wagons to the Wrong Stars?" <i>Agriculture and Human Values</i> 28(2):273–283.</li> <li>• *Valiente-Neighbours, J.M., 2012. Mobility, embodiment, and scales: Filipino immigrant perspectives on local food. <i>Agriculture and Human Values</i> 29, 531–541.</li> </ul> <p><i>In-class activity: Peer review of first drafts of papers</i></p>

Date	Topic	Texts and due dates:
9 May 22	Food security and alternative agriculture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allen, P., 1999. "Reweaving the food security safety net : Mediating entitlement and entrepreneurship." <i>Agric. Human Values</i> 16, 117–129.</li> <li>• *White, M.M., 2011. "D-Town Farm: African American Resistance to Food Insecurity and the Transformation of Detroit." <i>Environ. Pract.</i> 13, 406–417.</li> </ul>
9 May 24	Urban food access and activism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• *Guthman, J., 2008. "Bringing good food to others: investigating the subjects of alternative food practice." <i>Cult. Geogr.</i> 15, 431–447.</li> <li>• Block, D.R., Chávez, N., Allen, E., Ramirez, D., 2011. "Food sovereignty, urban food access, and food activism: contemplating the connections through examples from Chicago." <i>Agric. Human Values</i> 29, 203–215.</li> </ul>
10 May 29	Memorial day: no class	<i>Field assignment/ optional 6th reading response</i>
10 May 31	Where to from here?	<i>Select <b>two</b> readings from Week 10 module on Canvas and come prepared to discuss in small groups.</i>