RS 5530: SOCIOLOGY OF AGRICULTURE AND FOOD SYSTEMS

Tuesdays & Thursday, 9:35-10:55
Kottman 382
Fall 2014

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DESCRIPTION:
A review of theory and research associated with the sociology of agriculture and food systems from the 1970s to the present. The course focuses on theory and research that seeks to understand the evolution of the agricultural system; the impacts of agricultural change; the emergence of alternative agricultural and food systems; and the role of communities in supporting agricultural and food system development and consumers in transforming the agro-food system. A special focus of the 2014 class will be on emerging disharmonies of the neoliberal food regime and “solutions” proposed by various food system actors.

OBJECTIVES:
When the course is completed, the participant will demonstrate the ability to
1. Describe some of the major theoretical perspectives for interpreting agricultural change of the last 40 years;
2. Describe what is meant by the structure of agriculture and explain some of the changes and consequences of change in the structure of agriculture;
3. Become familiar with contemporary global food system challenges, including food security/sovereignty, biofuels, and environmental issues.
4. Describe key features of the alternative food system movement and Civic Agriculture and evaluate the meanings and strategies of each;
5. Identify various intersections of the state, capital, and society in the food system and explain how the actions/interests of each component contest, counteract, or complement those of others.

BACKGROUND:
This course will give students an opportunity to learn about changes in the agricultural and food system. With this information they will be empowered to more critically consider the practical and policy implications of agricultural change for nations, communities, families and individuals. This course provides foundational knowledge to graduate students interested in the specialized knowledge of the sociology of agriculture and food systems; to graduate and undergraduate students it also provides sociological insight into understanding contemporary food system change, and introduces students to the social dimensions of achieving a more sustainable food and agricultural system.
**COURSE OVERVIEW:**

The course can be divided into three major sections, with the first focusing on some of the overarching theoretical perspectives for studying the sociology of agriculture; the second focusing on contemporary issues of global food and agricultural change; and the third section focusing on proposed solutions, alternatives, and social movements for affecting change in the food system.

The course begins by exploring the “New” Sociology of Agriculture, reviewing literature related to the political economy of agriculture, agricultural industrialization and the Goldschmidt Hypothesis, and commodity chain analysis. We then examine food regimes, followed by neoliberalism and governance of the food system, with a consideration the intersecting motivations of the state, capital, and society. The source material in this section of the course will be a range of journal articles and chapters.

The course then explores social problems related to food and agriculture’s relationship to the environment, globalization, global food security, and malnutrition. We give particular attention to the intersection of global capital with global food security.

The focus then shifts to considering possible solutions to the above issues. We first consider the role of consumers and the power of consumption, followed by a discussion of the alternative agricultural movement (with particular attention on the sustainable agriculture and community food security dimensions of the alternative movement), as well as the emergence of Civic Agriculture and its underpinnings and goals. The course concludes with a consideration of the role citizenship and rights should play in informing food and agricultural policy.

**REQUIRED READINGS:**

There is one required textbook for the course. Additional texts are recommended, but not required (several chapters from these texts are assigned and readings are on Carmen). In addition, selected readings from journals, edited books, and single authored volumes as described in the course outline are available on the Carmen course site.

**Required:**


**Recommended, but not required:**

Several chapters will be used from the following volumes, although each text has additional content of possible interest. I recommend that all rural sociology students purchase the new rural sociology decennial volume edited by Bailey et al. The Allen text is particularly useful overview of agrifood movements.


**Course Requirements and Grading:**

Classroom time will primarily focus on discussion of the course readings, with supplemental content provided through lectures or guest presentations. Assignments to be completed outside of class will facilitate in-class work.

Grades will be assessed according to student performance on several different assignments. The breakdown of each assignment’s weight as a part of the final grade is as follows. There are a couple assignments unique to graduate students in the course and unique assignments for undergraduate students as well:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>All Students</th>
<th>Undergraduate Students Only</th>
<th>Graduate Students Only</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation, 10 percent</td>
<td>Discussion Leader, 10 percent</td>
<td>Discussion Leader, 15 percent</td>
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<tr>
<td>Midterm Exam, 30 percent</td>
<td>Reaction Paper (x2) 10 percent each</td>
<td>Book review, 15 percent</td>
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<td>Group Project, 30 percent</td>
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**The minimum percentages to achieve a given grade are as follows:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Minimum Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>93%</td>
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<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>90%</td>
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<tr>
<td>B+</td>
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<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>83%</td>
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<td>B-</td>
<td>80%</td>
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<td>C+</td>
<td>78%</td>
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<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>70%</td>
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<tr>
<td>D+</td>
<td>68%</td>
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<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>63%</td>
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<tr>
<td>D-</td>
<td>60%</td>
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<td>F</td>
<td>&lt;60%</td>
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**Assignments:**

**Participation (10 percent):**

Classroom participation will be judged according to: (1) activeness in the classroom as well as (2) consistency of classroom participation and attendance and (3) quality of classroom participation.

**Midterm Exam (30 percent):**

A midterm, in-class exam will take place on October 7. Students will be asked to answer a series of short answer, essay and/or multiple choice questions concerning course materials covered up to the day of the exam.

**Discussion Leader (15 percent for grad students; 10 percent for undergrad students):**

Each student will be responsible for serving as a class discussion leader once during the quarter. Assignment of class leader responsibilities will occur during the second class session. Discussion leadership will entail two parts, 1) A brief opening oral presentation (including a set of between 4 and 7 slides) highlighting the most important two or three points of the chapters/articles under consideration. Please note that all readings in a particular session are thematically related so the opening oral presentation should seek to succinctly synthesize some of the material. Creativity in presenting/augmenting the material is encouraged. 2) Development of two or three questions intended to stimulate class discussion after the brief opening oral presentation. More than one discussion leader may exist for a class session and students should coordinate with each other regarding how to facilitate discussion.

**Book Review (graduate students only) (15 percent):**

Graduate students in the course are to identify an appropriate scholarly book (single authored or edited volume) related to the Sociology of Agriculture and Food Systems. You can consult with me for ideas, do your own literature review, or check out resources such as the database maintained by Phil Howard to identify possible books to review (see [https://www.msu.edu/~howardp/booksfilms.html](https://www.msu.edu/~howardp/booksfilms.html)). Once you have selected a book, you need to let me know by October 9 the author and title of the book. Book reviews are to be submitted on or before November 20.
Reviews should be between 800 to 1,200 words. Double spaced, printed copies of your review should be submitted by the due date.

Guidance for the contents of a book review: A book review should indicate both the substance and the value of the book for its intended audience. The review should include a brief overview of the contents of the book and your final evaluation. You may find the following questions useful in preparing the review:

- Does the book have a clear and significant thesis and methodology?
- Is it timely or path breaking?; What is it’s significance to the field of Sociology of Agriculture if it is more a historical text?
- What is the quality of the author’s research and sources?
- Is it well written and clearly organized?
- What is the overall significance of this book in relation to themes covered in this course and/or themes that are appropriate to students of the Sociology of Agriculture and Food Systems?

The entire review including footnotes, indented matter, and references should be double spaced. The review should be headed using the following format exactly:


Reaction Papers (x2, undergraduates only) (10 percent each):

Undergraduate students will write two 1-2 page (about 400-500 words, double spaced) reaction papers that address matters associated with one of the class sessions occurring between October 9 through December 4. Half of the reaction paper should highlight the most important points of the chapters/articles and the remainder should focus on critical comments/observations about the articles. Students might argue a counter point, extend a particular idea of the readings to another matter, argue with the logic or relevance of an important point of the reading(s), etc. In essence, I will be looking for evidence that the student has engaged with the readings and is thinking critically about their key points. The reaction paper is due at the end of the session that is being reacted to. I will allow students to submit a revised reaction paper within one week of the original submission if class discussion prompts a desire to revise the reaction.

Group Project: Central/Ohio Agricultural/Community Food System project (30 percent):

There are many nascent and ongoing community food system development projects underway in Central Ohio and student groups will form in this course with each group identifying a nascent or existing activity and then conducting some research or programming to support or understand the activity. I can provide some suggestions of possible activities to look at, but I am also open to suggestions. I am envisioning an iterative process of students consulting with the food system development activity leaders and conducting research with the final outcome being a presentation that might be shared with the food system development leaders as well as accompanying written report to be shared with them and posted on the SRI website. An example of the process might be:

1) Meet with the food system development leader(s) to learn about the activity and to learn what questions these leaders might have about their activity that could be investigated further by the student group.

2) Conduct library/web research to acquire resources/information to answer questions that have been identified. There might even be some original data to be collected locally.
3) Once again meet with the activity leaders to discuss what has been found and discuss what further questions there might be.

4) Conduct some final research, then develop a visually stimulating presentation and an accompanying written report to be provided to the leader(s) that addresses some of he questions that have been posed.

Student groups will be assigned a 30 minute block of time in the final two regular class meetings to provide an oral presentation of the project to the class. Oral presentations will take place the last regular day of class (Tuesday, December 9) and during the final exam period (Friday, December 12, 10-11:45am). If appropriate, community members associated with the particular activity studied might be invited to the presentation. The written report should outline the nature of the project, the questions that exist and the answers that the group identified. The written report may be of variable length depending on the nature of the project but generally no more than 15 pages will be necessary. The final project written portion is due on the date of the group’s final presentation.

30 percent of the course grade will be based on the group project. Each student’s score on the project will be assessed as follows:

   a) 1/3 of the group project grade will be based on the judgment of other group project team members. Each project team member will assign a value of between 1 and 10 to themselves and other team members, with a higher score reflecting a favorable judgment of the particular team member’s contribution to the project. I will use this information to assign each group member an individual effort score.

   b) 1/3 of the group project grade will be based on the classroom presentation

   c) 1/3 of the group project grade will be based on the written report

**Academic Misconduct:**

*Academic misconduct of any kind will not be tolerated.* Examples of academic misconduct include, but are not limited to, cases of plagiarism and dishonest practices in connection with examinations and laboratory exercises. See Code of Student Conduct: Rule 3335-31-02. This and other rules can be found in the Resource Guide for Students or in the back of the Student Telephone Directory. *Individual effort is expected on all assignments.* If you have a question about approaches and procedures that might constitute academic misconduct, see the instructor.

**Statement about the Availability of Accommodations:**

If an accommodation based on the impact of a disability is needed, students should contact the instructor to arrange an appointment as soon as possible. At the appointment the course format can be discussed and any needs and potential accommodations can be anticipated. This class relies on the Office for Disability Services for assistance in verifying the need for accommodations and developing accommodation strategies. If students have not previously contacted the Office for Disability Services, they are encouraged to do so if appropriate to their needs.
COURSE OUTLINE

TH, AUGUST 28: INTRODUCTION
- About this course, review syllabus and assignments
- Background on the Sociology of Agriculture
- Variant of 2012 ENR Seminar presentation

TU, SEPTEMBER 2: INTRODUCTION TO SOCIOLOGY OF AGRICULTURE
- Carolan text, Pp. 1-8; 16-21

PART 1. RESEARCH THEORIES AND THEMES: 1970s TO PRESENT

TH, SEPTEMBER 4: AGRARIAN POLITICAL ECONOMY: THE AGRARIAN QUESTION AND BEYOND

TU, SEPTEMBER 9: AGRARIAN POLITICAL ECONOMY (CONT.)
- Carolan text, 28-34. “Perserverence of the Family Farm.”
- Recommended but not required:

TH, SEPTEMBER 11: U.S. AGRICULTURE AND CHANGE

TU, SEPTEMBER 16: THE MISSOURI SCHOOL & AGRICULTURAL INDUSTRIALIZATION
- Carolan text, Selections from Chapter 3, Understanding the Food System: Pages 41-51.
- USDA press release on public workshops to explore competition issues
- Recommended but not required:
TH, SEPTEMBER 18: GOLDSCHMIDT, COMMUNITY, AND ECONOMIC STRUCTURE

- Carolan text sections related to Goldschmidt, 94-107 (scan table 5.5)

TU, SEPTEMBER 23: COMMODITY CHAINS

- Carolan text sections related to commodity systems, Pages 58-61.

TH, SEPTEMBER 25: FOOD REGIMES

- Selected section from Carolan text, Food Regime, Pp. 55-58

TU, SEPTEMBER 30: NEOLIBERALISM & PRIVATE GOVERNANCE OF THE FOOD SYSTEM


TH, OCTOBER 2: THE ROLE OF THE STATE: APPLICATIONS FROM TRADITIONS

- Midterm exam review

*TU, OCTOBER 7: MIDTERM EXAM*

PART 2. DISHARMONIES IN THE NEOLIBERAL FOOD REGIME

TH, OCTOBER 9: AGRICULTURE AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Guest speaker: Ryan Hottle

- Carolan text, Chapter 9: Agroecosystems and The Nature of “Natures”
- Carolan text, Chapter 10: Food, Agriculture and the Environment
TU, OCTOBER 14: FOOD CRISIS, BIOFUELS, AND THE GLOBAL LAND GRAB
- Carolan text, Chapter 8: How Much is Enough?

TH, OCTOBER 16: MALNUTRITION & FOOD SECURITY
- Carolan text, Chapter 4, Malnutrition: Hidden and visible

PART 3. CONSUMPTION
What roles can consumers and consumption play in changing the food system?

TU, OCTOBER 21: PRODUCERS, CONSUMPTION & AGENCY

TH, OCTOBER 23: TRANSNATIONAL SUPERMARKET CHAINS, LABELING AND GOVERNANCE

TU, OCTOBER 28: GOVERNANCE OF FOOD ATTRIBUTES

TH, OCTOBER 30: CONSUMPTION, CULTURE, AND PRODUCTION
PART 4. CREATING ALTERNATIVES: SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND FOOD SYSTEM DEVELOPMENT

Are alternative agriculture(s) the best solution for addressing disharmonies of the neoliberal food regime? Is alternative agriculture a market or a movement?

TU, NOVEMBER 4: ALTERNATIVE AGRIFOOD SYSTEM MOVEMENT


TH, NOVEMBER 6: ALTERNATIVE AGRIFOOD SYSTEM MOVEMENT

Guest speaker: Carol Goland, Executive Director OEFFA

- Carolan text selected sections from Chapter 11: Alternative Agrofood Networks. Pages 249-262.

*TU, NOVEMBER 11: NO CLASS*

TH, NOVEMBER 13: ALTERNATIVE AGRIFOOD SYSTEM MOVEMENT, CRITICAL THOUGHTS

- Carolan text, Chapter 12: Avoiding the “Traps” in Agrifood Studies

TU, NOVEMBER 18: AG & FOOD SYSTEM DEVELOPMENT

PART 5. FOOD, AGRICULTURE, AND CITIZENSHIP

Do Western, liberal notions of democracy, rights, and citizenship have a role to play in transforming the food system?

TH, NOVEMBER 20: PUBLIC POLICY

**Guest speakers: Jill Clark, Caitlin Marquis**


TU, NOVEMBER 25: CIVIC AGRICULTURE


*TH, NOVEMBER 27: NO CLASS*

TU, DECEMBER 2: FOOD SOVEREIGNTY & RESPONSES TO FOOD CRISIS

- Carolan text, pages 262-265. *La Via Camesina* and Food Sovereignty.

Recommended but not required:


TH, DECEMBER 4: FOOD AS A BASIC RIGHT: LINKING FOOD SECURITY, CITIZENSHIP, CULTURE, AND GENDER

- Van Esterik, Penny. 1999. “Right to food; right to feed; right to be fed. The intersection of women’s rights and the right to food.” *Agriculture and Human Values*, 16: 225–232.

TU, DECEMBER 9: GROUP PROJECT PRESENTATIONS

FRI, DECEMBER 12, 10AM-11:45AM (FINAL EXAM PERIOD): GROUP PROJECT PRESENTATIONS, CONT’D