

Sociology 4131: SOCIOLOGY OF AGRICULTURE AND FOOD

Professor Jill Harrison

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University of Colorado at Boulder

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Class: Tues/Thurs 8:00-9:15am
in Education 155

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is an introduction to the sociology of agriculture and food networks. Particular attention will be paid to the theoretical, historical, and empirical issues of agriculture and food in the United States, with additional discussion of the global dimensions of many agrifood networks.

COURSE OVERVIEW AND OBJECTIVES

Much more than tractors and seeds, agriculture is a key economic sector, a way of life, a source of open space, a tremendous manipulation of natural resources, the source of essential staples and sustenance, and a space in which we interrogate and negotiate our relationship with the natural world as well as with each other. Agriculture has been conceptualized as “the middle landscape”: “that space, which is at once real and imaginary, between the city and the wilderness, wherein the agrarian and/or pastoral ideal resides, and where people live and work with nature” (Vos 2000: 246). Cutting through this image, however, remain a host of agrifood network problems that have become increasingly apparent in recent decades – including the economic vulnerability of many farmers, farm worker poverty, food safety crises, understudied technologies, animal welfare abuses, and air and water pollution from pesticides, fertilizers, and animal waste. These problems make clear the utmost importance of thoughtful, well-informed, and interdisciplinary analysis of agrifood networks, associated dilemmas, and their potential solutions.

This course is a sociological exploration of agriculture and food networks from three distinct but interrelated vantage points: changes in the structure and dynamics of agrifood networks, historical and current social movement responses to social and ecological agrifood problems, and shifting trends in academic analysis of agrifood networks and politics. In the first half of the course, we will examine the major structural forces that sociologists point to as shaping agrifood networks. Throughout, we will pay particular attention to the associated consequences for the environment and different social groups. In the second half of the course, we will critically reflect on some of the recent grassroots efforts to address the primary problems identified in the first half of the course. Two recent monographs, a collection of foundational articles, and several recent films will serve as the basis for interrogating the struggles, accomplishments, and limitations of different efforts to address social and ecological problems in agriculture and to drive it in a more sustainable and/or socially just direction.

The problems we will confront throughout this course are incredibly complex and daunting, defying simple, ‘silver bullet’ solutions. Students should be prepared to grapple with, struggle with, consider, and deliberate multiple and often conflicting perspectives about the causes of serious agrifood problems, as well as equally varied (and inconclusive) debates about how these problems should be solved. Students should understand that I am more concerned with posing difficult questions (and showing why they matter) than with offering definitive answers. My primary goal is to help students generally develop their critical thinking skills and to be more compassionate and engaged citizens.

REQUIRED READINGS

The following books are REQUIRED for all students and can be purchased from the campus bookstore:

Michael Mayerfeld Bell. 2004. *Farming for Us All: Practical Agriculture and the Cultivation of Sustainability*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press.

Michael Pollan. 2008. *In Defense of Food: An Eater's Manifesto*. New York: Penguin Books.

All other readings, some lecture materials, and other key information will be available through CULearn. You should log on to CULearn regularly (i.e., at least weekly) to stay informed of changes to the schedule and new materials.

GRADES

Your final grade for this course will be based on the following requirements (1000 points total):

1. *Participation* (100 points)

Your active engagement with the course material is required in this course. You need not always have something to say, but your consistent and informed participation in class is a course requirement. I highly recommend keeping an eye on how the news media covers current course-related issues, and bringing your observations and questions to class and/or office hours. I also suggest that you take notes throughout class. Do not expect that simply copying down the terms and diagrams I present on the board or screen to be sufficient.

2. *Take-Home Exams* (2 @ 250 points each)

- a. Exam #1. Due October 18. The first exam will be distributed in class on October 11, and it will be due on October 18 in class. It will cover materials and course concepts from the first half of the course.
- b. Exam #2. Due December 12. The second exam will be distributed in class on December 6, and it will be due by 5:00pm on December 12 in my office (218 Ketchum Hall). It will cover materials and course concepts from the second half of the course.

Note that there is no comprehensive final exam for this course.

3. *Reading Reflections* (3 @ 100 points each)

You are required to write three reading reflections (RRs) for this course, and they are due in class on September 1, October 6, and November 3. The number of points you receive for each depends on how well you address the specific questions/tasks for each assignment, how much your work demonstrates that you have meaningfully engaged with the assigned reading(s), and the degree to which you adhere to the assignment guidelines. You will not be judged on how well you adhere to what you think my point of view is.

Assignment guidelines: Reading reflections must be 2-3 double spaced pages, coherently organized, proofread, typed in 12-point font, formatted with 1-inch margins and page numbers, printed in hard copy, stapled, and submitted in class on the due date. You do not need a bibliography unless you reference a source not assigned for this course. Within your essay, be sure to cite your sources using the following in-text citation format: (lecture 9/2/11) or (Smith 2007: 1).

- a. RR1: Treadmill of production. Due September 1 (in class). (100 points) After completing the readings for this week, write a well-organized and carefully crafted essay that addresses the following questions/tasks:
 - i. Main arguments: *In your own words*, summarize Gould et al's main arguments that they make about the treadmill of production, including the main ways in which it functions.
 - ii. Overarching comprehension: What is 'the treadmill of production' a theory about? What does it seek to explain?
 - iii. Evidence: Identify at least two pieces of evidence of the treadmill of production in agrifood networks, as presented in lecture or other course readings.
 - iv. Evaluation and/or questions: Finish your essay with a critical statement of how compelling you find this theory, and/or questions that you have about it.

- b. RR2: Cultural structures of unsustainable farming. Due October 6 (in class). (100 points) After reading the first half of *Farming for Us All* (pp. 1-147), write a well-organized and carefully crafted essay that addresses the following questions/tasks:
 - i. Arguments: According to Bell, why do so many people farm in environmentally unsustainable ways? Be sure to identify both material and cultural structures, and explain how they contribute to unsustainable agriculture.
 - ii. What does Bell mean by "farming the self" (Ch. 4) and "farming knowledge" (ch. 5)?
 - iii. Evaluation and/or questions: Finish your essay with a critical statement of how compelling you find Bell's arguments about the cultural structures of unsustainable farming, and/or questions that you have about this book.

- c. RR3: Agrarian idealism in agrifood politics. Due November 3 (in class). (100 points) After completing this week's required readings, write a well-organized and carefully crafted essay that addresses the following questions/tasks *and* demonstrates that you have read the essays by Berry, McIntosh, and Guthman:
 - i. We can define the 'agrarian ideal' as: the belief that small-scale, organic, or other alternative farms adhere to a family farm model, that those farms do not rely on hired labor, and that family farms represent the pinnacle of hard work, virtue, and the foundation of democracy. Identify evidence of the agrarian ideal in the films and readings for this course. Be sure to properly cite your sources.
 - ii. How prevalent do you think the agrarian ideal is in our society, or in agrifood politics? Explain why you think so.
 - iii. Julie Guthman raises concerns about the agrarian ideal (or "agrarian imaginary"). What do you think her main concerns are?
 - iv. Evaluation and/or questions: Finish your essay with a critical statement of how compelling you find Guthman's arguments, how her article made you feel, and/or questions that you have about it.

4. **Film Review Essay** (100 points)

- a. *Film night*: We will watch the film, "Food Inc.", on December 1 at 7:00pm in 100 ATLAS. Take notes throughout the movie, keeping the following essay assignment in mind:
- b. *Essay*: Write an essay that critically evaluates the film in light of what you have learned in class this semester. Specifically, your tasks are to identify what you see as the film's two main strengths and its two main weaknesses. Explicitly reference at least 6 course readings to support your arguments; one of those readings must be Michael Pollan's *In Defense of Food*. Your paper must be 2-3 double-spaced pages, coherently organized, proofread, typed in 12-point font, formatted with 1-inch margins and page numbers, printed in hard copy, stapled, and submitted in class on December 6 in class.

In sum, your final grade will be based on the following:

100 points	Participation
300 points	Reading Reflections (3 @ 100 points each) due Sept 1, Oct 6, and Nov 3
250 points	Exam #1 (take-home; due Oct 18)
250 points	Exam #2 (take-home; due Dec 12)
100 points	Film Review Essay (due Dec 6)
<u>1000 points total</u>	

Your total points earned will correspond to the following final letter grades:

930-1000	A	730-769	C
900-929	A-	700-729	C-
870-899	B+	670-699	D+
830-869	B	630-669	D
800-829	B-	600-629	D-
770-799	C+	0-599	F

COURSE POLICIES

Preparation: I expect each student to come to class with the reading done on the day it is listed on the syllabus. “Doing the readings” well means carefully reading, taking notes about the main arguments and evidence, jotting down your questions, and re-reading. Please bring the reading materials and your notes with you to class and be prepared to ask questions or make comments that occurred to you while doing the readings. I expect you to actively engage with the readings in class, so preparation is essential. You are expected to spend an average of six hours per week preparing for this course (outside of our time together in the classroom).

Attendance: To do well in this course, you will need to regularly attend class. When you are absent, you are responsible for taking the initiative to find out what you missed. You should obtain notes from a fellow classmate; you may then come ask me about updates to the syllabus and clarifications on specific points that you do not understand. I will not post or otherwise share my slides or lecture notes.

Punctuality: Please be sure to arrive at class on time. Come see me ASAP if you anticipate that you will regularly be late.

Late work: All written work will be penalized 10% for each day that it is late. Please save us both a lot of pain and suffering and turn your work in on time.

Incapacitating illness: If a serious illness or injury disrupts your ability to complete assigned work on time, please come see me with a doctor’s note.

Grades: I will grade your work very carefully and try to be as transparent as possible about my grading decisions. If you want to discuss with me the grade you received on one of your papers or exams, you must: put your concerns into writing and make an appointment to see me in office hours.

Laptops, cell phones, and other electronic communication devices: Because the use of laptops, cell phones, and other such devices distracts both the user and other students, I do not allow their use in the classroom and require that they be stored out of sight during class. If you believe that you must use a laptop during class: please talk to me privately about this, bring documentation from the appropriate authority (e.g., Disability Services, or your doctor) stating that you need to use a laptop every day, and keep in mind that, if I decide to permit you to use it, you may only do so for taking notes.

UNIVERSITY POLICIES

Disability accommodations: If you qualify for accommodations because of a disability, please submit to me a letter from Disability Services in a timely manner so that we can figure out how to address your needs. Disability Services determines accommodations based on documented disabilities. (C4C N200; www.colorado.edu/disabilityservices; 303/492-8671)

CU-Boulder Honor Code: Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. We encourage all students to review the University of Colorado Honor Code booklet. The Honor Code mission reads as follows: "As citizens of an academic community of trust, CU-Boulder students do not lie or cheat whether they are on campus or acting as representatives of the university in surrounding communities. Neither should they suffer by the dishonest acts of others. Honor is about academic integrity, moral and ethical conduct, and pride of membership in a community that values academic achievement and individual responsibility. Cultivating honor lays the foundation for lifelong integrity, developing in each of us the courage and insight to make difficult choices and accept responsibility for actions and their consequences, even at personal cost."

Plagiarism is one important aspect of this honor code. All work that you submit for this class must be your own work, and you are required to quote and cite all references properly. Although this mandate appears straightforward, I am well aware of how murky the task can be. Wherever you are unsure about quoting and citing, please come see me to figure out the best strategy.

Discrimination and harassment: Any student who believes he or she has been the subject of discrimination or harassment based upon race, color, national origin, sex, age, disability, religion, sexual orientation, or veteran status should contact the Office of Discrimination and Harassment (ODH) at 303-492-2127 or the Office of Judicial Affairs at 303-492-5550. Information about the ODH and the campus resources available to assist individuals regarding discrimination or harassment can be obtained at <http://www.colorado.edu/odh>.

Classroom behavior: Students and faculty each have responsibility for maintaining an appropriate learning environment. I have a professional responsibility to treat all students with understanding, dignity and respect, to guide classroom discussion and to set reasonable limits on the manner in which we express opinions in the classroom. Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important with respect to individuals and topics dealing with differences of race, culture, religion, politics, sexual orientation, gender variance, and nationalities. You can find information about the university's policies about classroom behavior here: <http://www.colorado.edu/policies/classbehavior.html>.

Observance of religious holidays: Campus policy regarding religious observances requires that faculty make every effort to reasonably and fairly deal with all students who, because of religious obligations, have conflicts with scheduled examinations, assignments, or required attendance. In this class, I will make every effort to accommodate all students who have such conflicts with scheduled examinations, assignments, or attending class; students must notify me well in advance of the scheduled conflict.

SCHEDULE OF TOPICS, REQUIRED READINGS, AND ASSIGNMENTS

Please note: I will periodically assign additional short readings and make other small changes to the syllabus.

Date	Topic	Reading(s)	Written Work
8/23	Introduction to the Course and Agrifood Networks	Beardsworth and Keil 1997 Gliessman 2007	
8/25	The Agrarian Question	Reinhard and Barlett 1989 Mills 1959	
8/30	Agrarian Political Economy	Heffernan 1998 Fishman 2003	
9/1		Gould et al 2004 Striffler 2004	RR#1 due in class
9/6	Farm and Food Policy	Bell 2004: 29-87 (book) MacDonald et al 2006 USDA 2009 Philpott 2011	
9/8		Friedmann and McMichael 1989	
9/13	Agricultural Science	Hightower 1973	
9/15		Dowie 2001 Shiva 1991	
9/20, 9/22	Environmental Regulation	Harrison 2011	
9/27	Labor and Im/migration Policing	Martin et al 2006	
9/29		Harrison and Lloyd 2011 Cave 2011	
10/4	Food Culture	Schlosser 2001 Yan 2008	
10/6	Cultural Structures of Unsustainable Farming	Bell 2004: 1-147 (book)	RR#2 due in class
10/11	Farmer Networks	Bell 2004: 151-250 (book)	Exam #1 distributed in class
10/13	The Neoliberal Turn in Agrifood Politics	Guthman 2004	
10/18		Shreck 2008 FLO website	Exam #1 due in class
10/20		Allen et al 2003	
10/25	The Localist Turn in Agrifood Politics	Kloppenburg et al 1996 Locavores website	
10/27		Hinrichs 2003	
11/1	The Agrarian Ideal in Agrifood Politics	Berry 2001	
11/3		McIntosh 1988 Guthman 2011	RR#3 due in class
11/8	Farm Worker Justice	Majka and Majka 2000	
11/10		Brown and Getz 2008	
11/15	Environmental Justice: Pesticide Drift Activism	Moses 1993 Clarren 2008	
11/17	Food Security, Food Justice, and Food Sovereignty	Holt-Gimenez 2011 Poppendieck 2000	
11/21-25	FALL BREAK		
11/29	Diet Reform in Agrifood Politics	DuPuis 2007 Biltekoff 2007	
12/1	Agrifood Politics Goes Mainstream <i>*Note: class today will be at 7pm in 100 ATLAS</i>	Pollan 2008 (book)	
12/6		(finish Pollan 2008)	Film Review Essay due in class Exam #2 distributed in class
12/8	Wrap-Up (last day of class)	Stevenson et al 2007	
12/12	[no class]		Exam #2 due in my office

FULL LIST OF REQUIRED READINGS

Alan Beardsworth and Teresa Keil. 1997. The making of the modern food system. In *Sociology on the Menu: An Invitation to the Study of Food and Society*. London: Routledge, pp. 32-46.

Stephen R. Gliessman. 2007. The need for sustainable food production systems. From *Agroecology: The Ecology of Sustainable Food Systems*, 2nd ed. Boca Raton: CRC Press, pp. 3-17.

Nola Reinhard and Peggy Barlett. 1989. The persistence of family farms in United States agriculture. *Sociologia Ruralis* 29 (3/4): 203-225.

C. Wright Mills. [1959]. The sociological imagination. Reprinted in *The Meaning of Sociology*.

William Heffernan. 1998. Agriculture and monopoly capital. *The Monthly Review* 50 (3): 46-59.

Charles Fishman. 2003. The Wal-Mart you don't know. *Fast Company*, December.

<http://www.fastcompany.com/node/47593/print>

Kenneth A. Gould, David N. Pellow, and Allan Schnaiberg. 2004. Interrogating the treadmill of production: Everything you wanted to know about the treadmill but were afraid to ask. *Organization and Environment* 17(3): 296-316.

Steve Striffler. 2004. Undercover in a chicken factory. *Utne Reader*, January/February.

James MacDonald, Robert Hoppe, and David Banker. 2006. Growing farm size and the distribution of farm payments. USDA Economic Research Service. Economic Brief No. 6.

USDA. 2009. Fact sheet: FSA administered programs. USDA Farm Service Agency. September.

Tom Philpott. 2011. Big Ag won't feed the world. *Mother Jones*. June 15. <http://motherjones.com/tom-philpott/2011/06/vilsack-usda-big-ag>

Harriet Friedmann and Phillip D. McMichael. 1989. Agriculture and the state system: The rise and decline of national agricultures, 1870 to the present. *Sociologia Ruralis*, 29 (2): 93-117.

Jim Hightower. 1973. Selections from *Hard Tomatoes, Hard Times*. Cambridge, MA: Schenkman.

Mark Dowie. 2001. Food. From *American Foundations: An Investigative History*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Vandana Shiva. 1991. The Green Revolution in the Punjab. *The Ecologist* 21 (2): 57-60.

Jill Lindsey Harrison. 2011. Selections from *Pesticide Drift and the Pursuit of Environmental Justice*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. (pp. 85-117, plus notes)

Philip Martin, Michael Fix, and J. Edward Taylor. 2006. Migrants in U.S. agriculture. From *The New Rural Poverty: Agriculture and Immigration in California*. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute, pp. 9-22.

Jill Lindsey Harrison and Sarah E. Lloyd. 2011. Illegality at work: Deportability and the productive new era of immigration enforcement. *Antipode* 43.

Damien Cave. 2011. Better lives for Mexicans cut allure of going north. *New York Times*. July 6.

<http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2011/07/06/world/americas/immigration.html>

Eric Schlosser. 2001. Why the fries taste so good. From *Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All-American Meal*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, pp. 111-131.

Yungxiang Yan. 2008. Of hamburger and social space, consuming McDonald's in Beijing. From *Food and Culture*, ed. Carole Counihan and Penny Van Esterick. New York: Routledge, pp. 500-522.

Julie Guthman. 2004. Selections from *Agrarian Dreams: The Paradox of Organic Farming in California*. Berkeley: University of California Press. (pp. 1-41)

Aimee Shreck. 2008. Resistance, redistribution, and power in the fair trade banana initiative. From *The Fight over Food: Producers, Consumers, and Activists Challenge the Global Food System*, ed. Wynne Wright and Gerad Middendorf. University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, pp. 121-144.

Fair Trade Labeling Organization website: <http://www.fairtrade.net/standards.html> (Read about fair trade standards)

Patricia Allen, Margaret Fitzsimmons, Michael Goodman, and Keith Warner. 2003. Shifting plates in the agrifood landscape: The tectonics of alternative agrifood initiatives in California. *Journal of Rural Studies* 19: 61-75.

Jack Kloppenburg, Jr., John Hendrickson, and George W. Stevenson. 1996. Coming in to the foodshed. *Agriculture and Human Values* 13 (3): 33-42.

Locavores website: <http://www.locavores.com/how/why.php>

Clare C. Hinrichs. 2003. The practice and politics of food system localization. *Journal of Rural Studies* 19: 33-45.

Wendell Berry. 2001. The whole horse. From *The New Agrarianism: Land Culture, and the Community of Life*, ed. Eric T. Freyfogle. Washington, DC: Island Press, pp. 63-79.

Peggy McIntosh. 1988. White privilege: Unpacking the invisible knapsack. Wellesley College Center for Research on Women.

Julie Guthman. 2011. "If they only knew": The unbearable whiteness of alternative food. From *Cultivating Food Justice*, ed. Alison Hope Alkon and Julian Agyeman. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Linda C. Majka and Theo J. Majka. 2000. Organizing U.S. farm workers: A continuous struggle. From *Hungry for Profit: The Agribusiness Threat to Farmers, Food, and the Environment*, ed. Fred Magdoff, John Bellamy Foster, and Frederick H. Buttel. New York: Monthly Review Press, pp. 161-174.

Sandy Brown and Christy Getz. 2008. Towards domestic fair trade?: Farm labor, food localism, and the 'family scale' farm. *GeoJournal* 73: 11-22.

Marion Moses. 1993. Farm workers and pesticides. In Robert D. Bullard, ed., *Confronting Environmental Racism: Voices from the Grassroots*. Boston: South End Press, pp. 161-178.

Rebecca Clarren. 2008. Pesticide drift: Immigrants in California's Central Valley are sick of breathing poisoned air. *Orion Magazine* July/August: 56-63.

Eric Holt-Gimenez. 2011. Food security, food justice, or food sovereignty?: Crises, food movements, and regime change. From *Cultivating Food Justice* by Alison Hope Alkon and Julian Agyeman. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Janet Poppendieck. 2000. Want amid plenty: From hunger to inequality. In *Hungry for Profit: The Agribusiness Threat to Farmers, Food, and the Environment*, ed. Fred Magdoff, John Bellamy Foster, and Frederick H. Buttel. New York: Monthly Review Press, pp. 189-202.

E. Melanie DuPuis. 2007. Angels and vegetables: A brief history of food advice in America. *Gastronomica* 7: 34-44.

Charlotte Biltekoff. 2007. The terror within: Obesity in post 9/11 U.S. life. *American Studies* 48 (3): 29-48.

G.W. Stevenson, Kathryn Ruhf, Sharon Lezberg, and Kate Clancy. 2007. Warrior, builder, and weaver work: Strategies for changing the food system. From *Remaking the North American Food System: Strategies for Sustainability*, ed. C.C. Hinrichs and T.A. Lyson. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, pp. 33-62.