

Sociology 4131: SOCIOLOGY OF AGRICULTURE AND FOOD

Professor Jill Harrison

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Class: Tues/Thurs 11:00-12:15
in Humanities 1B90

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 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 social justice. 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. Three 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.

Julie Guthman. 2004. *Agrarian Dreams: The Paradox of Organic Agriculture in California*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

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

All other readings, some lecture materials, and other key information will be available through Desire2Learn (D2L). You should log on to D2L regularly (i.e., at least weekly) to stay informed of changes to the schedule and new materials.

ASSIGNMENTS

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. To get full credit for your participation in this course, you must attend regularly, be prepared to discuss required readings, and actively participate regularly in class discussions. 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.

2. **Take-Home Exams** (3 @ 250 points each)

- a. Exam #1. Due February 14. The first exam will be distributed in class on February 9, and it will be due on February 14 in class.
- b. Exam #2. Due March 20. The second exam will be distributed in class on March 15, and it will be due on March 20 in class.
- c. Exam #3. Due May 8. The third exam will be distributed in class on May 3, and it will be due on May 8.

Late policy for exams: Late exams will be docked 10% per day late or any portion thereof.

Note: There is no comprehensive final exam for this course.

3. **Short Essays** (4 @ 25 points each)

You are required to write four short essays for this course, and they are due in class on January 26, March 1, March 13, and April 17. I have designed the assignments to get you to engage with particular course concepts and readings and to be ready to discuss them together in class. The number of points you receive for each essay depends on how well and how meaningfully you address the specific

questions/tasks for each assignment, 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: Short essays should be approximately 2 double spaced pages, professionally composed, 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).

Late policy for short essays: I do not accept any late short essays.

- a. Short Essay #1: Treadmill of production. Due January 26 in class. After completing the Bell 2009 reading for this week, write a short essay that addresses the following questions/tasks:
 - i. What is 'the treadmill of production' a theory about? What does it seek to explain?
 - ii. *In your own words*, summarize Bell's main arguments about how the treadmill of production works.
 - iii. End your essay with a list of questions or comments you have about the reading.
- b. Short Essay #2: Review of the film "American Harvest". Due March 1 in class. On your own, watch the film "American Harvest" (available for online streaming through the CU Library website for this course). Then write a short essay that addresses the following questions:
 - i. What do you see as the film's main strengths?
 - ii. Which scenes did you find to be particularly compelling?
 - iii. How did you feel at the end of the film? Why?
 - iv. What questions do you have about the issues discussed in the film?
- c. Short Essay #3: Cultural structures of unsustainable farming. Due March 13 in class. After reading the first half of *Farming for Us All* (pp. 1-147), write a short essay that addresses the following questions:
 - i. What does Bell mean by "farming the self" (ch. 4)?
 - ii. What does Bell mean by "farming knowledge" (ch. 5)?
 - iii. What questions do you have about the reading?
- d. Short Essay #4: Ethnographic observation at the farmers market. Due April 17 in class. In class on April 12, we will discuss why and how to conduct ethnographic observation. Then, on Saturday, April 14, you will go to your local farmers market and be an ethnographic observer there. You should plan to spend at least one hour at the event, jot down notes while there, and write up your field notes soon afterward. Then, write a short essay that addresses some or all of the questions/tasks noted on the assignment guidelines (distributed in class on April 12).

4. **Book Review Essay** (50 points)

Due May 3 in class. Write a short essay that critically evaluates Michael Pollan's 2006 book, *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, in light of what you have learned in class this semester. Specifically, your tasks are to identify what you see as the book's two main strengths and its two main weaknesses. Explicitly reference at least 4 course readings to support your arguments. Your paper must be 2-3 double-spaced pages, coherently organized, proofread, professionally composed, typed in 12-point font, formatted with 1-inch margins and page numbers, printed in hard copy, stapled, and submitted in class on May 3.

Late policy: Late book review essays will be docked 10% per day late or any portion thereof.

GRADES

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

100 points	Participation
750 points	Take-home exams (3 @ 250 points each) due Feb 14, March 20, and May 8
100 points	Short Essays (4 @ 25 points each) due January 26, March 1, March 13, and April 17
50 points	Book Review Essay (due May 3)
<i>1000 points total</i>	

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: It is very important that you arrive to class on time, as arriving late is disruptive and distracting. Come see me ASAP if you anticipate that you will regularly be late.

Late work: I will not accept any late short essays. All late exams and book review essays will be penalized 10% per day late or any portion thereof. 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 essays or exams, you must put your concerns into writing and make an appointment to see me in office hours. If you decide to dispute a grade, I reserve the right to alter the grade as I see fit (i.e., either up *or* down).

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 generally do not allow their use in the classroom and require that they be stored out of sight during class. There are two exceptions to this rule. First: 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. Second: When we are discussing a particular required reading, and you have that available in electronic form instead of in hard copy, you may use your laptop or other electronic communication device to view the required reading. I will revoke this right if I find that students are abusing this policy.

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. Contact: 303-492-8671, Center for Community N200, and <http://www.colorado.edu/disabilityservices>. If you have a temporary medical condition or injury, see guidelines at <http://www.colorado.edu/disabilityservices/go.cgi?select=temporary.html>.

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. As a member of the faculty, 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. All of us in the classroom must exercise courtesy and sensitivity with respect to individuals and topics dealing with differences of race, culture, religion, politics, sexual orientation, gender variance, and nationalities. Note that class rosters are provided to the instructor with the student's legal name. I will gladly honor your request to address you by an alternate name or gender pronoun. Please advise me of this preference early in the semester so that I may make appropriate changes to my records. See policies at <http://www.colorado.edu/policies/classbehavior.html> and at http://www.colorado.edu/studentaffairs/judicialaffairs/code.html#student_code.

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
1/17	Introduction to Sociology of Agrifood Systems	Beardsworth and Keil 1997 Mills 1959	
1/19	Major Trends in Agrifood Systems Today, and the Industrial Ideal	Pollan 2006 (Part I: pp. 1-122) Fitzgerald 2003	
1/24	Corporate Consolidation Among Off-Farm Actors	Heffernan 1998 Fishman 2003	
1/26	The Treadmill of Production: Capitalism at Work	Bell 2009 Striffler 2004	Short Essay #1 due in class
1/31	Farm and Food Policy	MacDonald et al 2006 USDA 2009 Philpott 2011	
2/2		Peterson 2009	
2/7	Agricultural Science	Hightower 1973	
2/9		Dowie 2001 Shiva 1991	Exam #1 distributed in class
2/14	Farm Labor	Martin et al 2006 IATP 2007	Exam #1 due in class
2/16		Harrison and Lloyd 2011 Schlosser 2001	
2/21		Majka and Majka 2000	
2/23		CIW 2012 SFA 2012	
2/28	[no class] <i>On your own: Watch the film "American Harvest" and complete Short Essay #2</i>	Mancuso 2008 (film: "American Harvest")	
3/1		Nevins 2007 Kotlowitz 2007	Short Essay #2 due in class
3/6	Environmental Regulation	Harrison 2011 (pp. 85-121)	
3/8		Harrison 2011 (pp. 121-144)	
3/13	Farming Culture and Farmer Networks	Bell 2004: 1-147	Short Essay #3 due in class
3/15		Bell 2004: 151-250	Exam #2 distributed in class
3/20	Organic Agrifood Systems	Guthman 2004 (chs. 1-3, and the appendix)	Exam #2 due in class
3/22		Guthman 2004 (chs. 4 and 6 carefully; skim the others)	
3/27, 3/29	SPRING BREAK [no class]	Pollan 2006 (Part II: pp. 123-276)	
4/3	Fair Trade	FLO website	
4/5		Shreck 2008	
4/10	Food System Localization	Kloppenburger et al 1996 Locavores website Royte 2009	
4/12		Born and Purcell 2006 Donohue 2009	
4/14**	<i>[Go to Saturday Farmers Market, observe, and write up fieldnotes]</i>		
4/17	The Agrarian Ideal in Agrifood Politics	Guthman 2011 Brown and Getz 2008	Short Essay #4 due in class
4/19	Neoliberalization of Agrifood Politics	Allen et al 2003 Poppendieck 2000	
4/24	Diet Reformism	Yan 2008	
4/26		DuPuis 2007 Biltekoff 2007	
5/1	Agrifood Politics Goes Mainstream	Pollan 2006 (review Parts I and II, and finish the book)	
5/3	Wrap-Up [last day of class]	Stevenson et al 2007	Book Review Essay due in class; Exam #3 distributed in class

FULL LIST OF REQUIRED ARTICLES, CHAPTERS, AND WEBSITES

- 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.
- C. Wright Mills. [1959]. The sociological imagination. Reprinted in *The Meaning of Sociology*.
- Deborah Fitzgerald. 2003. The industrial ideal in American agriculture. From *Every Farm a Factory: The Industrial Ideal in American Agriculture*. New Haven: Yale University Press, pp. 10-32.
- 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>
- Michael Mayerfeld Bell . 2009. Selection from *An Invitation to Environmental Sociology*. Los Angeles, CA: Pine Forge Press, pp. 58-67.
- 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>
- E. Wesley F. Peterson. 2009. U.S. agricultural policy: How not to save the family farm. From *A Billion Dollars a Day: The Economics and Politics of Agricultural Subsidies*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, pp. 123-151.
- 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.
- 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.
- IATP (Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy). 2007. A fair farm bill and immigration. Minneapolis, MN: IATP.
- Jill Lindsey Harrison and Sarah E. Lloyd. 2011. Illegality at work: Deportability and the productive new era of immigration enforcement. *Antipode* 43.
- Eric Schlosser. 2001. The chain never stops. *Mother Jones* July/August. <http://motherjones.com/politics/2001/07/chain-never-stops>
- 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.
- CIW (Coalition of Immokalee Workers). 2012. CIW Website. <http://ciw-online.org/>.
- SFA (Student Farmworker Alliance). 2012. SFA Website. <http://www.sfalliance.org/>.
- Joseph Nevins. 2007. Dying for a cup of coffee? Migrant deaths on the U.S.-Mexico border region in a neoliberal age. *Geopolitics* 12: 228-247.

Alex Kotlowitz. 2007. Our town. *New York Times Magazine*. August 5.

Jill Lindsey Harrison. 2011. Selections from *Pesticide Drift and the Pursuit of Environmental Justice*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. (pp. 85-144, plus notes)

FLO (Fair Trade Labeling Organization). 2012. FLO website. <http://www.fairtrade.net/standards.html>. (Read about fair trade standards)

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 Gerard Middendorf. University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, pp. 121-144.

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

Locavores. 2012. Locavores website. <http://www.locavores.com/how/why.php>.

Elizabeth Royte. 2009. Street farmer. *New York Times*. July 5.

Branden Born and Mark Purcell. 2006. Avoiding the local trap: Scale and food systems in planning research. *Journal of Planning Education and Research* 26: 195-207.

Caitlin Donohue. 2009. Out of reach: How the sustainable local food movement neglects poor workers and eaters. *San Francisco Bay Guardian*, December 2. <http://www.sfbg.com/2009/12/02/out-reach>.

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.

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

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.

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.

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.

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.