

SOCIOLOGY 4117: FOOD AND SOCIETY

University of Colorado Boulder, Spring 2018
Tuesday and Thursday – HLMS 211 – 3:30 - 4:45

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COURSE OVERVIEW

Food is a basic of human survival. Yet how humans produce food, what we eat, who gets to eat, and how we eat are questions with diverse and complex answers. Food offers insight into broader power relations in society, practices of culture and identity, and changing relationships between humans and the natural world. This class seeks to shed light on some of these questions and their multifaceted answers. We will first examine the structure of our food system – how our society produces food, and how and why that has changed over time. This includes an overview of industrialization, capitalism, and the social and ecological consequences of contemporary agriculture. We will then examine debates about how to feed the world (‘who gets to eat’), agriculture in developing countries, and the role for new technologies. Having identified numerous problems with the food system, we will then critically evaluate efforts to fix the food system, including organic and local agriculture, and food justice movements. In the final portion of the course, we will ask questions about food consumption (‘what we eat and how we eat’), taking a look at gender roles, body image, and ideals of what constitutes good food.

Students will be asked to think critically about our food system – drawing on political, economic, and cultural approaches to understanding social systems. This course also emphasizes social scientific training and skills for critical media literacy. At several points in the semester, students will identify and evaluate claims being made about food. The course does not emphasize “right answers,” but encourages students to think carefully about claims, identify broader patterns, and apply explanatory analytics.

Acknowledgement: This syllabus draws on my experiences teaching with Jill Harrison, and builds on various iterations of her syllabi for this course.

REQUIRED READINGS

The following books are required. They can be purchased at the bookstore (or online), and there is one copy of each book on reserve at Norlin library (at the West entrance to Norlin).

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

Michael Carolan. 2011. *The Real Cost of Cheap Food* (First edition). New York: Routledge.

The rest of the class readings are posted on D2L in weekly folders, and indicated in the course schedule by the author’s last name.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. Attendance and participation (5% each for 10% total): You cannot do well in this course without being in class and participating. I expect you to have done the readings and to come to class prepared to discuss the material. At the end of each class, I will give students 5 minutes to reflect on that day’s material. I will use these end-of-class reflections to keep track of attendance. You can miss two class meetings without penalty.

After that, you will lose 5 points for each absence. Arriving late or leaving more than 15 minutes early will count as an absence. I will waive absences only for documented cases of illness, injury, emergency, etc.

2. Five Essays: (10% each for 50% total). The course essays (3-4 pages each) are designed to give you a chance to synthesize and critically engage with a segment of course material. **I will hand out additional guidelines in class two weeks before these papers are due.** I will post grading rubrics on D2L. To do well, you should review learning goals and incorporate relevant readings and course concepts into your papers.

- These papers will be turned in on D2L by the due date at 3:20 pm.
- Late policy: 20% off for one day late, 50% off thereafter.

Essay 1: Due Thursday 2/8. Evaluating capitalist agriculture

Essay 2: Due Tuesday 3/6. Science literacy: Assessing claims made about GMOs

Essay 3: Due Thursday 3/22. How to feed the world?

Essay 4: Due Thursday 4/12. Assessing efforts to change the food system

Essay 5: Due Thursday, 5/3. Reflections on eating and your body

3. Mid-term test: Week 6: In-class, Thursday, 2/22 (20%): The mid-course test will be multiple-choice and short-answer. It is meant to provide an additional way of evaluating your understanding of course concepts.

4. Final exam: During Finals Week: **TBA (20%)**: This exam (same format as the mid-term) will focus on material after the mid-term.

GRADES:

Grades are based on: A = 93+, A- = 90-92, B+ = 87-89, B = 83- 86, B- = 80-82, C+ = 77-79, C = 73-76, etc.

COURSE SCHEDULE

All readings should be completed by the day they are listed.

Date	Topic	Reading	Assignments and Tests
Week 1	The U.S. food system		
1/16	Introduction to the sociology of food and agriculture		
1/18	Trends in U.S. agriculture and the industrial ideal	Carolan 2012; Fitzgerald 2003	
Week 2	U.S. Agricultural policy		
1/23	U.S. agricultural policy	Carolan book Ch. 9; MacDonald et al. 2006; Philpott 2012	
1/25	Animal agriculture	Winders and Nibert 2004; Carolan book Ch. 5	
Week 3	Corporate consolidation and capitalism		
1/30	Consolidation among off-farm actors	Howard 2016; Fishman 2003	
2/1	Material structures of capitalism	Bell book, Part 1; Bell 2009	
Week 4	Environmental issues		
2/6	Environmental consequences of industrial agriculture	Carolan book Ch. 6 Weis 2010	
2/8	Regulation	Eder 2017; Rabin 2017; Knudsen 2017	Essay 1 due
Week 5	Labor in agriculture		
2/13	Slavery and farm labor historically	Beckert and Rockman 2016; Timeline of agricultural labor	

2/15	Agricultural labor today	Striffler 2004; “Fields of Tears” 2010; Marosi and Bartletti 2014	
Week 6			
2/20	Cultural structures of capitalism	Bell book, Part 2	
2/22	Mid-term test in class		Test 1 in class
Week 7	Debates over how to feed the world		
2/27	Hunger: production versus distribution	Wisner et al. 2004; Carolan book Ch. 4	
3/1	The Green Revolution	Clapp 2012	
Week 8	Contemporary global issues		
3/6	Biotechnology	Borlaug 2000; Kumbamu 2006; Grist selections	Essay 2 due
3/8	Food aid and land grabbing	Carolan book Ch. 2; Oxfam 2005	
Week 9	Free trade and food		
3/13	Free trade	Wise 2009	
3/15	<i>Film: Life and Debt</i>	(Work on Essay 3)	
Week 10	Efforts to change the system		
3/20	Organic agriculture	Pollan 2006	
3/22	Local agriculture	Kloppenburg 1996; Born and Purcell 2006	Essay 3 due
	SPRING BREAK		
Week 11			
4/3	Critiques of neoliberal food activism	Johnston 2008	
4/5	Farmer movements	Bell book, Part 3	
Week 12	Social movements		
4/10	Farm labor activism	Majka and Majka 2000 Watch: <i>Food Chains</i>	
4/12	Food sovereignty movements	Watch: <i>Food Sovereignty Now</i> and <i>Seeds of Sovereignty</i> and then read Agarwal 2014	Essay 4 due
Week 13	Dietary reform		
4/17	Dietary reform efforts	Guthman 2008; Szabo 2011	
4/19	Obesity	Campos et al. 2006; Lupton 2013	
Week 14	Cultural structures and eating		
4/24	Class	Bobrow-Strain 2012; Searcey and Richtel 2017	
4/26	Gender	Bordo 2003	
Week 15	Eating in Boulder		
5/1	Healthism	Luna 2018; Bratman and Knight 2001	
5/3	Local initiatives		Essay 5 due
Final exam: During Finals Week (Time TBD)			

COURSE POLICIES:

Laptops and cell phones: I do not allow the use of either in the classroom, unless you have a documented reason for using a laptop. I know this is frustrating. However, I have found that digital distractions are too strong for most of us. Furthermore, studies have shown that people learn better when they take notes by hand: <https://www.npr.org/2016/04/17/474525392/attention-students-put-your-laptops-away>

Class communication

D2L: Class readings are posted on D2L. Grades will also be posted on D2L in a timely manner, and I will post announcements or news on D2L. I expect you to check D2L regularly for announcements.

E-mail: For questions about the course, please read and double check this syllabus first. By university policy, grades cannot be discussed over e-mail; please come to my office hours or set up an appointment. E-mail is official communication and should be composed as such. Do not expect replies to emails outside of normal working hours.

Disability accommodations: If you qualify for accommodations because of a disability, please bring me a letter from Disability Services **within the first few weeks** so we can figure out how to address your needs. Disability Services determines accommodations based on documented disabilities. Contact: 303-492-8671, online, or e-mail dsinfo@colorado.edu. For temporary conditions or injuries, see Temporary Injuries under Quick Links guidelines at the Disability Services website (<http://disabilityservices.colorado.edu/>) and discuss your needs with me.

CU-Boulder Honor Code: All students of the University of Colorado at Boulder are responsible for knowing and adhering to the academic integrity policy of this institution. Violations of this policy may include: cheating, plagiarism, aiding academic dishonesty, fabrication, lying, bribery, and threatening behavior. All incidents of academic misconduct shall be reported to the Honor Code Council (honor@colorado.edu; 303-735-2273). Students who are found to be in violation of the academic integrity policy will be subject to both academic sanctions from the faculty member involved and non-academic sanctions (including but not limited to university probation, suspension, or expulsion). For more information see <http://honorcode.colorado.edu/>

- **Plagiarism** is an important aspect of this honor code. All work for this class must be your own work, which means properly citing and quoting all references. Please be careful to use your own words and cite others' work when you draw upon their ideas. I will include citation guidelines with the handout for the first essay.

Discrimination and harassment: CU-Boulder is committed to maintaining a positive learning, working, and living environment. The University of Colorado does not discriminate on the basis of "Protected Classes" (race, color, national origin, sex, pregnancy, age, disability, creed, religion, sexual, orientation, gender identity, gender expression, or veteran status) in admission and access to, and treatment and employment in, its educational programs and activities (Regent Law, Article 10, amended 11/8/2001). CU-Boulder will not tolerate acts of discrimination or harassment based upon Protected Classes, or related retaliation against or by any employee or student. Individuals who believe they have been discriminated against should contact the Office of Discrimination and Harassment (ODH) at 303-492-2127 or the Office of Student Conduct (OSC) at 303-492-5550. More information at www.colorado.edu/institutionalequity/. For sexual harassment policies and reporting see www.colorado.edu/sexualharassment or call the Office of Sexual Harassment at 303-492-2127 or the Office of Judicial Affairs at 303-492-5550.

Respectful classroom environment: Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important in dealing with subject matters that touch upon race, culture, religion, politics, sexual orientation, gender, and nationalities. I will do my best to create a respectful classroom environment, and I expect students to do so as well. If you have any personal concerns about how I can best respect you, please do not hesitate to contact me and discuss how we (or I) can improve our learning environment. I also expect that students, you will do your part to respect your peers and help build a space of open and non-threatening dialogue in our classroom.

Observance of religious holidays: Please inform me by the end of the second week of class if you will be unable to attend class, take exams, or turn in assignments on time because of religious obligations and observances so that we can work out a revised schedule with you to meet course requirements.

Student-Athletes: Please notify me by the end of the second week of class – in person and in writing – about any known conflicts between academic requirements and intercollegiate varsity athletic events.

The Writing Center: I encourage students who want to improve their writing to use the Writing Center, which teaches strategies to formulate and organize strong thesis statements, use and cite evidence appropriately, master style and grammar, and overcome writing anxiety. Services are free to all CU students. The Writing Center is in Norlin Library, Room E-156. Contact wrtghelp@colorado.edu, (303) 735-6906, <http://www.colorado.edu/pwr/writingcenter.html>

FULL LIST OF COURSE READINGS

Michael Carolan. 2012. Selection from *The Sociology of Food and Agriculture*. London: Earthscan.

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, 10-32.

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.

Tom Philpott. 2008. A reflection on the lasting legacy of 1970s USDA Secretary Earl Butz. Grist. February 8. <http://grist.org/article/the-butz-stops-here/>

Bill Winders and David Nibert. 2004. "Consuming the surplus: expanding "meat" consumption and animal oppression." *Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, 24 (9): 76-96.

Philip H. Howard. 2016. "Food system concentration: a political economy perspective." From *Concentration and Power in the Food System: Who Controls What We Eat?* Bloomsbury Press.

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: Pine Forge Press, 60-67.

Tony Weis. 2010. "The Accelerating Biophysical Contradictions of Industrial Capitalist Agriculture." *The Journal of Agrarian Change* 10 (3): 315-341

Steve Eder. 2017. "When Picking Apples on a Farm With 5,000 Rules, Watch Out for the Ladders," *New York Times*. Dec 27. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/27/business/picking-apples-on-a-farm-with-5000-rules-watch-out-for-the-ladders.html>

Roni Caryn Rabin. 2017. "A Strong Case Against a Pesticide Does Not Faze E.P.A. Under Trump." *New York Times*, May 15. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/15/health/pesticides-epa-chlorpyrifos-scott-pruitt.html>

Sanne H. Knudsen. 2017. Selections from "Regulating cumulative risk." *Minnesota Law Review*.

Sven Beckert and Seth Rockman. 2016. Selection from *Slavery's Capitalism: A New History of American Economic Development*. University of Pennsylvania Press.

"Timeline of Agricultural Labor," Youth & Young Adult Network of the National Farm Worker Ministry. <http://nfwm.org/education-center/farm-worker-issues/timeline-of-agricultural-labor/>

Steve Striffler. 2004. "Undercover in a Chicken Factory." *Utne Reader*, January/February.

The Economist. 2010. "Fields of tears." December 16. <http://www.economist.com/node/17722932>

Richard Marosi and Don Bartletti. 2014. Product of Mexico, Part I: Hardship on Mexico's farms, a bounty for U.S. tables. *Los Angeles Times*. Article, photos, and video. <http://graphics.latimes.com/product-of-mexicocamps/>

Ben Wisner, Piers Blaikie, Terry Cannon, and Ian Davis. 2004. "Famine and natural hazards," from *At Risk: Natural Hazards, People's Vulnerability and Disasters*. New York: Taylor and Francis.

Jennifer Clapp. 2012. Selection from *Food*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 33-43.

- Norman E. Borlaug. 2000. "Ending world hunger: The promise of biotechnology and the threat of antiscience zealotry." *Plant Physiology* 124: 487-490.
- Ashok Kumbamu. 2006. "Ecological Modernization and the "Gene Revolution": The Case Study of Bt Cotton in India." *Capitalism Nature Socialism*. 17:4, 7-31.
- Nathanael Johnson. 2013. Selections from "Panic-free GMOs." *Grist*. <http://grist.org/series/panic-free-gmos/>
- Oxfam. 2005. "Food aid or hidden dumping?" Oxfam Briefing Paper, March 2005.
https://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/bp71_food_aid.pdf
- Timothy Wise. 2009. "Promise or Pitfall? The Limited Gains from Agricultural Trade Liberalization for Developing Countries." *Journal of Peasant Studies* 36: 4, 855 - 870
- Michael Pollan. 2006. "Big Organic," from *The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals*. New York: Penguin Books, 134-184.
- Jack Kloppenurg, Jr., John Hendrickson, and George W. Stevenson. 1996. "Coming in to the foodshed." *Agriculture and Human Values* 13:3, 33-42.
- 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.
- Josee Johnston. 2008. "The citizen-consumer hybrid: ideological tensions and the case of Whole Foods Market." *Theory and Society*. 37:3, 229-270.
- Linda C. Majka and Theo J. Majka. 2000. Organizing U.S. farm workers: A continuous struggle. From *Hungry for Profit*, 161-174.
- Bina Agarwal. 2014. "Food sovereignty, food security and democratic choice: critical contradictions, difficult conciliations," *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 41:6, 1247-1268.
- Julie Guthman. 2008. "Bringing good food to others: Investigating the subjects of alternative food practice." *Cultural Geographies* 15: 431-447.
- Paul Campos, Abigail Saguy, Paul Ernsberger, Eric Oliver, and Glenn Gaesser. 2006. "The epidemiology of overweight and obesity: Public health crisis or moral panic?" *International Journal of Epidemiology* 35: 55-60.
- Deborah Lupton. 2013. Selections from *Fat*. London: Routledge.
- Michelle Szabo. 2011. The challenges of 're-engaging with food': Connecting employment, household patterns and gender relations to convenience food consumption in North America. *Food, Culture, and Society* 14:3, 547-566.
- Aaron Bobrow-Strain. 2012. Selections from *White Bread: A Social History of the Store-Bought Loaf*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Dionne Searcey and Matt Richtel. 2017. "Obesity Was Rising as Ghana Embraced Fast Food. Then Came KFC." *New York Times*.
https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/02/health/ghana-kfc-obesity.html?_r=0
- Susan Bordo. 2003. Selection from *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Jessie Luna. 2018. "The ease of hard work: boundary work, distinction, and embodied neoliberalism." *Draft manuscript*.
- Steven Bratman and David Knight. 2001. Selection from *Health Food Junkies: Orthorexia Nervosa: overcoming the obsession with healthful eating*. Broadway Publishing.