

ENST 580 THE POLITICS OF FOOD

Fall 2015, Tuesday & Thursday 11:10 — 12:30

Gallagher Business Building, Room 108

There is, then, a politics of food that, like any politics, involves our freedom. We still (sometimes) remember that we cannot be free if our minds and voices are controlled by someone else. But we have neglected to understand that we cannot be free if our food and its sources are controlled by someone else. The condition of the passive consumer of food is not a democratic condition. One reason to eat responsibly is to live free.

~ Wendell Berry, "The Pleasures of Eating"

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Office hours: If I can be of assistance, please come see me during my office hours by signing up for a meeting time on the sheet posted across from my office door in Rankin. My office hours are: Tuesdays 9:00-10:00 and Wednesdays 10:20-12:00. If these times are impossible for you, please contact me to make an appointment.

Overview and Intentions

Food is central to our lives—it connects us with each other and the natural world. The system that produces and brings food to North Americans is contested terrain. Indeed, a wide variety of actors are now engaged in what can be understood as the politics of food. In this case, "politics" broadly refers to ways various actors with different beliefs, principles, or interests try to advance or defend their positions in the very complex sphere of food and agricultural systems. That is, these actors – governmental entities, businesses, institutions, and organizations – create and try to influence food policy. Understanding these dynamics requires an exploration of the historical development of agriculture in the United States (a model that has been exported to other nations), an introduction to food policy, and an exploration of the aims and strategies of alternative agri-food movements.

Through a selection of interdisciplinary scholarship, often referred to as "agrifood studies," and through critical reflection and discussion on the readings, I aim to provide you with a solid grounding that will enable you to pursue academic and civic work on these issues in the future. Also, this course will introduce you to some of the individuals and organizations involved in these issues in Montana. Lastly, you will have a chance to learn more about a topic related to food and/or agriculture of interest to you, and to develop your understanding of policy analysis and social change. Periodic reflection papers and analytical essays will help you synthesize course material; the term paper will enhance your research skills and knowledge, and the in-class presentation at the end of the term will help you to improve your public speaking skills.

Learning Outcomes

1. To introduce the broad field of agri-food studies and some of the leading scholars in the field.
2. To increase participants' knowledge of the development of US agriculture; the role of science and technology in agricultural industrialization; the major structural issues in the dominant food system (e.g., concentration of economic power); and questions surrounding the sustainability of current food systems.
3. To develop participants' knowledge of the alternative agri-food movements; the strategies being pursued; and the potentials and limits of those strategies.
4. To develop analytical and critical thinking skills through essay assignments, discussion, and reflections.
5. To develop research skills and increase substantive knowledge through a term paper assignment, and to practice presentation skills by presenting major findings to the class.

Accessing the Readings

The required readings (see schedule) will be posted on our Moodle site for this course. The syllabus is also posted at the top of the Moodle site so you can go there to access any hyperlinks easily if you want. In addition, there are three required books available for purchase through the UC Bookstore. These are:

Carlisle, Liz. 2015. *Lentil Underground: Renegade Farmers and the Future of Food in America*. New York, NY: Gotham Books.

Lengnick, Laura. 2015. *Resilient Agriculture: Cultivating Food Systems for a Changing Climate*. Gabriola Island, BC, Canada: New Society Publishers.

Wilde, Parke. 2013. *Food Policy in the United States: An Introduction*. London: Routledge.

Requirements and Opportunities

Class participation: The course is organized as a seminar, which means it is discussion focused (although I will lecture some, especially at the start). Its quality greatly depends upon the active participation and contributions of all members. This is a graduate level seminar; therefore, you must be prepared to read, think, and take responsibility for your learning. In addition, all of us have a responsibility to use this opportunity to learn from the experiences, insights, and values of others in the course.

My aim is to create a learning community in which we will grapple seriously and critically with the issues presented by the readings. There is no one way to make this happen, but a few things will help us along:

- Recognizing that we are all learners (there are no experts). We are just in different "places," we bring different backgrounds, and we are going to be learning different things along the way.

- Learning requires an investment of time and effort. It is essential that we each put in the intellectual labor, if you will, before each of our class sessions. This means carefully reading all materials prior to each class. Take notes on what you read and jot down questions you have about the work.
- Learning also requires a willingness to question assumptions – including our own – and an interest in exploring different and multiple perspectives on a given topic.
- Attending class consistently is essential to your learning and your contribution to others' learning.

Reflection papers: At five points during the semester, I will ask you to write a short, fairly informal reflection paper on a particular topic (to be assigned).

Analytic Essays: Two essay assignments will ask you to think critically about what you read, to synthesize the material covered, and perhaps do some extra research. I will distribute the question(s) that I want you to cover about two weeks before they are due. More specific guidance on these papers will be distributed at that time. Typically, these papers should be five to seven pages, typed, and double-spaced with normal margins and fonts. I expect your work to be well organized, grammatically correct, and completely referenced.

Term Projects: Through research, you have an opportunity to delve more deeply into a topic related to food and agriculture that interests you. The final paper will be approximately 15-20 pages, double-spaced, and properly referenced. You will present the results of your research at the end of the term to the class.

The topic is up to you, but I strongly encourage you to focus as much as possible. To help you with this, I ask you to submit a term paper pre-proposal by Sept. 15, and a more developed proposal and outline by Oct. 20 for my review and feedback. I will also create some space during class sessions for you to share your ideas and directions with your colleagues.

We will discuss possible ideas during class (and come see me in my office hours too, if you like). Here are a few crumbs of food for thought. Perhaps you will want to explore and evaluate a particular social change strategy (e.g., food policy councils, organic certification and labeling, specific policies), or study an organization pursuing it. Maybe you want to learn more about a particular environmental or social problem in agriculture (e.g., pesticide contamination of water; groundwater depletion; soil erosion; loss of honey bees). Perhaps you will want to study a particular crop grown in Montana (e.g., wheat, Flathead cherries), and explore its production and marketing. Maybe you want to learn about a specific alternative agricultural practice, such as management intensive rotational grazing. Or you could look at a program within the Farm Bill and explore strengths and limitations. Maybe you want to look at the current debate of protecting farmland in Missoula County and the politics surrounding it. Perhaps you will want to conduct a commodity chain analysis and compare/contrast two versions of the same foodstuff (e.g., local pasture-raised broiler chickens compared with Tyson-brand broilers); I can provide you with more specifics on how to do a commodity chain analysis. Feel free to work on projects that may inform or tie into your final Masters or Senior projects.

Paper Proposals:

A pre-proposal is due **September 15**. In about 200 words explain the topic that interests you and why.

By **October 20**, turn in a more developed thesis statement and outline (with references). In other words, begin to sketch out the argument you will make in your paper and how it might take shape. Include any questions you may have of me.

Feel free to come talk with me about your research ideas and papers at any time.

Guest speakers and field trips: Guest speakers will be added as appropriate. I hope to offer at least one short field trip, if we can schedule it (perhaps on a Friday afternoon).

All participants in this course are invited to attend the annual meeting of the Alternative Energy Resources Organization (AERO) near Great Falls at the end of September. More will be said about this in class, but know that most of the costs of your participation will be covered by the Environmental Studies Program (e.g., transportation, food, camping). I will ask you to volunteer a couple of hours at the conference as well, in exchange for the reduce rate AERO offers us.

Grading: Please note the following grading procedures, and mark the due dates on your calendar so you can plan accordingly. I will use the plus/minus grading system (A, A-, B+, B, B-, and so on).

Assignment:	Possible Points:
Participation	50
Five reflection papers	25
Two analytic essays (up to 50 points each)	100
Term Project	50
Oral Presentation	25
Total possible points	250