

**ENST 580 THE POLITICS OF FOOD**  
Fall 2020, Mondays and Wednesdays 2:30-3:50  
Jeanette Rankin Hall Room 202

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**Office hours:** Tuesdays 3:40-5:00; Wednesdays 11-12:20; and Fridays 11-12:00  
I will circulate a weekly signup sheet so that you can schedule virtual appointments during my office hours. If they don't work for you, please contact me for an alternative.

### **Overview and Intentions**

Whether we think about it or not, one of the most fundamental ways we interact with the natural and social world every day is through the food we eat. Indeed, food is central to our lives – a basic human need imbued with political, economic, ecological, and cultural meaning. Yet, today, the vast majority of North Americans know very little about the food we eat, where it comes from, and how it is grown and distributed. This course seeks to reduce some of that distancing as we explore not only the dominant food system, but also various alternatives that have developed alongside it.

On contested terrain, a variety of actors are now engaged in what can be understood as the politics of food. Here, I use the term “politics” broadly to refer to ways actors with different beliefs, principles, or interests try to advance or defend their positions in the complex sphere of food and agricultural systems. These actors – governmental agencies and officials, businesses, institutions, and trade and advocacy organizations – create and try to influence food policy. Understanding these dynamics – in particular, the social forces of the market, the state, and civil society – requires an exploration of: (1) the historical development of agriculture and industrial food production in the US (a model that has been exported to other nations); (2) the structure, benefits, and consequences of the industrial agri-food system; and (3) the potentials and limits of agri-food movements.

The course will demonstrate an approach to interdisciplinary study and practice. Organized as a seminar, we will read deeply, and engage in meaningful discussion. You will have the opportunity to improve your critical thinking, reading, writing, research, and oral communication skills through class materials, discussions, and research projects. This is a vast area of study, and we can only cover a few relevant topics in the time we have. Therefore, I aim to provide you with a solid grounding that will enable you to pursue academic, policy, and/or civic work on these issues in the future.

### **Specific Learning Objectives**

1. To introduce you to the broad, interdisciplinary field of “agri-food studies” and some key topics within it.
2. To increase your knowledge of the industrial food system and factors keeping that system in place.
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 introduce you to individuals and organizations involved in food and sustainable ag issues in Montana.
5. To develop your critical thinking skills through analytical essays, response questions, and discussion.
6. To develop your research skills and increase substantive knowledge about a topic you choose.
7. To improve presentation skills by sharing the major findings of your term research project.

### **Important Covid-19 Prevention Reminders:**

Masks: [View UM's face covering policy](#). All University employees, students, contractors, vendors and visitors must wear face coverings on site at a University location, and off-site in all University programs and activities in:

- Indoor spaces (including classrooms)

- Enclosed or partially enclosed outdoor spaces
- Outdoor settings when people are unable to keep a six-foot distance at all times
- University owned vehicles when more than one person is in a vehicle, including but not limited to ASUM busses and vans.

This requirement is consistent with federal, state, and local COVID-19 public health directives and the position of the Montana University System. This policy is in full effect until otherwise communicated.

- If the class is being recorded, instructors must notify students of the recording.
- Each student is provided with a Healthy Griz kit. We expect students to clean their personal work space when they arrive for class, and before they leave the classroom.
- Refill stations for cleaning supplies/hand sanitizer will be set up around campus - please learn where they are and use them.
- Classrooms may have one-way entrances / exits to minimize crowding.
- Students are discouraged from congregating outside the classroom before and after class. In the case of 3 hour-long classes, instructors should stagger breaks for small groups of students.
- Instructors should assign seating to ensure social distancing and take attendance to support contact tracing efforts.
- Instructors should not allow more students in their classrooms at any time, for any reason, than the [maximum approved capacity](#).
- Additional seating should not be added to classrooms.
- Drinking liquids and eating food (which requires mask removal) is strongly discouraged within the classroom.
- There is high demand for spaces on campus to accommodate students with inadequate WiFi in their homes or quick turnarounds between face-to-face and remote classes. A list of remote learning spaces with the days and times available for student use will be posted on [the Keep on Learning website](#). There will be signs posted outside of these buildings and rooms to indicate their availability.
- Stay home and contact the Curry Health Center at (406) 243-4330 if you feel sick and/or if exhibiting COVID-19 symptoms.
- If you are diagnosed with COVID-19, follow instructions for quarantine and contact your advisor so they can help you stay on track academically.
- Students, please remain vigilant outside the classroom and help mitigate the spread of COVID-19.

### **Requirements and Opportunities**

**Class Participation (20%):** This is a graduate-level seminar, which means it is discussion focused with a minimum of lecture. Its quality greatly depends upon the active participation and contributions of all members. That means it is critical that you do all the readings in advance of the class session for which they are assigned.

**Effective Participation:** My aim is to create a learning community that grapples seriously with the issues presented by the readings, speakers, and other material. There is no one way to make this happen, but a few things will help us along:

- Committing to the investment of time and effort that learning requires of us.
- Jotting down notes as you read to engage with the material more deeply. Writing notes usually clarifies thinking, improves contributions to discussions, and prepares you for the essay assignments.
- Questioning assumptions – including our own – with an interest in exploring different and multiple perspectives on a given topic. Be respectful in the process.
- Recognizing that we are all learners (there are no experts). We bring different backgrounds, and we are going to be learning different things along the way.

- Minding your own participation level. That is, if you are a person who tends to speak frequently, please be careful not to dominate discussions. Be sure you occasionally step back, and listen to make room for others. In contrast, if you are a person more reticent to speak up, or simply prefer more time before chiming in, we will try to ease your participation with activities such as small groups. Still, I encourage you to try to step up out of your comfort zone so that you can share your knowledge and perspectives in the larger group too.
- Attending class consistently because it is essential to your learning and your contribution to others' learning. If you are sick, please take care of yourself, and minimize the spread of germs.

**Readings:** The required book is available from a locally-owned, independent bookseller, **Shakespeare and Co.** Location: 103 S. 3rd St. (at the corner of Higgins and 3<sup>rd</sup>., on the south side of the bridge). Store hours: Mon - Fri. 10-6, Sat. 10-5, Sun 12 – 5. Ask at the main desk for the book for this course.

White, Monica. 2019. *Freedom Farmers: Agricultural Resistance and the Black Freedom Movement*. University of North Carolina Press.

Other readings (see schedule) will be posted on the Moodle site for this course. The top section of our site contains materials like the syllabus, resources, handouts, and assignments.

**Discussion Questions and Comments on Readings:** To facilitate a level of participation and analysis appropriate to a graduate-level seminar, we will use the Moodle discussion forums to help us prepare for class sessions and share topics for discussion. Specifically, at least four times during the semester, each student will post a meaningful discussion question regarding the readings or other assigned material, and help facilitate the discussion of your question during class.

Discussion questions must be **posted by 4 PM the day before the class session** for which the reading is assigned (e.g., so Sunday night by 4 for Monday class; Tuesday night by 4 for Wednesday class). Plan accordingly.

You are strongly encouraged to respond briefly and engage with the questions posed both online and, especially, during our class discussions. I will also pose questions and opportunities to engage online.

Keep questions open-ended, clear, and thought provoking. If your questions are too broad (e.g., “how do we change this?”), it will not stimulate very deep discussion. Consider the following ideas:

- Ask us to explain the key theories, concepts, or empirical insights made in the readings so that we are sure we understand them.
- Raise methodological questions (e.g., What are the methods? How appropriate are the methods chosen for answering the research question? Are they described in enough detail? What are the strengths and weaknesses of the methods used?)
- Identify specific passages in the reading that were difficult for you to understand, and ask us to clarify them.
- Identify where and why you agree or disagree with the author, and engage us in that point. Why is their argument convincing or not?
- Explore the political positions of the author(s), and values and assumptions embedded in their argument.
- Ask us to make comparisons and connections among ideas in the readings assigned for that day with readings or discussions we have previously had in class.
- Push us to think about how our own worldviews and life experiences might influence how we read the assignment.

**Analytic Essays (40%):** Two essay assignments will ask you to synthesize the material covered and think critically about that material. 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. These papers will be about 7 pages,

typed, and double-spaced with normal margins and fonts. I expect your work to be well organized, grammatically correct, and completely referenced.

**Term Project and Presentation (40%):** Through research, you have an opportunity to delve more deeply into a topic related to food and agriculture that interests you. For the paper, you may either (1) write a comprehensive literature review on a specific area of study, or (2) write a paper that explores a specific topic of historic or contemporary importance in the food and agricultural system. For either option, the specific topic is up to you, but I encourage you to focus as much as possible. I will create some time during class sessions for you to share your ideas with your colleagues, and I encourage you to utilize my office hours to discuss your projects.

**Submit a 300-word proposal on Sept. 16.** In your proposal, pose a clear research question that will guide you. Provide some context for the topic chosen, and convince the reader that it is important and relevant. Don't just state that it's significant; convince me why you think it is so. Try to be as specific as you can be at this point (e.g., "urban agriculture" is a huge topic in the literature now, so if you want to study it, narrow it down to something like: how urban ag might contribute to gentrification or what participants in urban ag projects think about them). Your proposal should include a preliminary bibliography of at least five clearly relevant scholarly sources.

The **final paper** will be approximately **15 pages**, double-spaced, and properly referenced. You will share your results at the end of the term in an oral presentation to the class.

**Guest speakers and field trips:** Added as we are able.

**Modifications:** Students with disabilities may request reasonable modifications by contacting me. The University of Montana assures equal access to instruction through collaboration between students with disabilities, instructors, and Disability Services for Students. "Reasonable" means the University permits no fundamental alterations of academic standards or retroactive modifications.

**Deadlines (see schedule):**

- A proposal is due **September 16**.
- Essay #1 is due **Sept. 23**; essay #2 is due **Oct. 28**.
- Term papers due by 5 pm in my mailbox in Rankin on **November 24**.

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

<u>Assignment:</u>	<u>Percent of Grade</u>
Participation, reading discussion questions	20
Two analytic essays (20% each)	40
Term Project – Proposal	5
Term Project - Presentation	10
Term Project - Paper	25
	<b>100% total</b>