ENST 594.02: The Politics of Food

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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 in “The Pleasures of Eating”

Overview of the Course

The contemporary food and agricultural system is contested terrain, and a wide variety of actors are now engaged in the politics of food. In this case, “politics” broadly refers to the ways that 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. Thus, the purpose of this graduate seminar is to study and analyze some of recent debates regarding the agrifood system and the politics surrounding those debates.

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. In addition, the course gives you a chance to learn more about a topic related to the politics of food that interests and develop your understanding of policy analysis and social change. In-class presentations at the end of the term will help you to improve your public speaking skills.

Accessing the Readings

The required readings are listed on the attached schedule, and 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.

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 session. 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.**

**Analytic Essays/Assignments:** 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 near the start of each section. 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 these papers to be well organized, grammatically correct, and completely referenced.

**Term Projects:** The term projects provide an opportunity for you to delve more deeply into a topic related to food policy and politics that interests you. Basically, this assignment asks you to pick an issue to study and engage with it. There are many prospects at the moment with the local farmland protection discussion in full force, the Montana Legislature in session, the Farm Bill at the federal level under debate (it was not passed in 2012, but extended for 9 months), and regulatory decisions by agencies. Your topic does not need to be focused on a governmental policy, however. You could also look at the policies of an institution (e.g., farm to institution; UM Farm to College will turn 10 this spring!) or those of a business (e.g., sourcing of food products at a restaurant).

I will share some ideas with you for topics you might pursue and how you might find information on other topics and/or how to get involved. In addition, I will give you more details about the assignment. Generally, once your topic is chosen, you will learn much more about it. The kinds of questions you will explore include: What is the issue? Who are the decision makers and what are their interests? Which stakeholders or interest groups are trying to influence the process, and what are their positions? What strategies are being used? What are the prospects for successful adoption or implementation of the policy position you support? What do you think might enhance those prospects?

To learn how to translate your research into action, you will also be asked to engage in one or more actions related to the issue, and then to reflect on your experiences. You will report on your findings or activities in presentations, papers and other products due at the end of the term.

If more than one person chooses the same topic, it will probably make sense to work in teams.

**Paper/Project Proposals:** In an informal proposal due on **February 14**, please tell me which topic you have chosen, why it is of interest to you, what key resources you have already identified, and any questions you may have of me regarding leads and so on.

**Guest speakers and field trips:** Guest speakers will be added as appropriate. I would like to organize one or two field trips depending on your level of interest.

**Advising:** If I can be of assistance, please come see me during my office hours. I have a sign-up sheet on the bulletin board across from my office door. If my office hours are impossible for you, contact me about setting up an appointment.
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).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment:</th>
<th>Due:</th>
<th>Possible Points:</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>Throughout</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two analytic essays (up to 50 points each)</td>
<td>Feb. 28, Apr. 25</td>
<td>100</td>
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<tr>
<td>Term Project</td>
<td>May 15</td>
<td>100</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total possible points</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>250</strong></td>
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**COURSE MENU**

(Subject to change at the whim of the chef and diners)

1. Tues., Jan. 29 – What’s on Our Plate?

   **PART ONE: AGRICULTURAL INDUSTRIALIZATION**

2. Thurs., Jan. 31 – Agrarianism and Industrialism

   **Mon. Feb. 4** – Please attend one or both of these lectures by Anna Lappe, and be prepared to discuss them on Tuesday in class. Her bio is posted on Moodle. At the lectures, please take notes on the following questions: (1) What were her main points and overall message? (2) What new information did you take away from the lecture(s)? (3) What questions did the lecture(s) raise for you? (4) Do you think her messaging is effective? Why or why not?

   "Eat the Sky: Connecting the Dots between Climate, Food, and the Future of Farming"
   Seminar at 3:10-4:30 PM, Gallagher Business Building, Room 123

   "Sustainability, Sustenance, and Social Change: How Sustainable Food and Farming Can Nourish the World and Transform Communities" 8:00 PM, Dennison Theatre.

3. Tues. Feb. 5 – Discussion on Lappe
   The lectures are a great opportunity for you, so I strongly encourage you to attend. Her biography is posted on our Moodle site. If you absolutely cannot, read the Myth #1 Companion Reading Guide, posted on Moodle. Also, check out foodmyths.org and watch the video on the home page. Answer the questions listed above. Even those of you who do attend may want to read these materials and check out her website.
4. Thurs. Feb. 7 – Agricultural Development: Structure and Markets


Supplemental:

5. Tues., Feb. 12 – Knowledge and Ecological Agriculture


Clarren, Rebecca. 2008. “Pesticide drift: Immigrants in California’s Central Valley are sick of breathing poisoned air.” Orion July/August: 56-63.


8. Thurs., Feb. 21 – The Promise of GE


10. Thurs., Feb. 28 – ESSAY #1 DUE.

PART TWO: THE POLITICS OF FOOD SYSTEM TRANSFORMATION

11. Tues., March 5 – Historical Context: Alternative Agrifood Movements


12. Thurs., Mar. 7 – Considering the Movement(s?)


Supplemental:


14. Thurs., Mar. 14 – Farmland Protection in Missoula County

15. Tues., Mar. 19 – Engaging the Market: Campus Food

Hassanein, Neva, Scott Kennedy, Beth Neely, and Paul Hubbard, editors. 2007. “Executive summary.” Tracing the Chain: An In-depth Look at the University of Montana’s Farm to College Program. Missoula, MT: University of Montana Environmental Studies Program.
16. Thurs., Mar. 21 – Montana Innovators

17. Tues., Mar. 26 – Food Safety and Community Food Systems

18. Thurs., Mar. 28 – TBD

SPRING BREAK: Week of April 1

19. Tues., April 9 – TBD

20. Thurs., April 11 – TBD

21. Tues., April 16 – Challenging the “Local”

22. Thurs., April 18 – Work session

23. Tues., Apr. 23 – ESSAY #2 DUE

25. Thurs., Apr. 25 – PRESENTATIONS

26. Tues., Apr. 30 – PRESENTATIONS

27. Thurs., May 2 – PRESENTATIONS

28. Tues., May 7 – PRESENTATIONS

29. Thurs., May 9 – PRESENTATIONS

30. Wed. May 15 – Exam period at 1:10-3:10. FINAL TERM PAPERS DUE.
Note: If it works for everyone, we will probably select another time to meet and have a final gathering/potluck and reflection on the course.