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ENST 391.90: Literature and Film of Agriculture - The Dirt Farmer, from Homesteader to Moral Placeholder

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ENST 391 U

Literature and Film of Agriculture: The Dirt Farmer, from Homesteader to Moral Placeholder. 3 cr. January 9 – 23, 2014

Context, Purpose, and Outcomes: Farmers and ranchers occupy a unique place in America's heritage and the consciousness of its people. Their hard work founded and continues to support Montana as we know it. As well as food, farmers and ranchers maintain much of the open landscape we love and the resilient character we admire. Yet iconic status has not guaranteed security for farmers in the contemporary global economy. As agricultural lands consolidate or are converted to development, the number of farms and ranches has declined sharply, and with them go century-old rural communities. The people who stay in rural agriculture do so largely for the way of life. Farmers and ranchers work in close contact with the tragic or redemptive power of the elements—sun, rain, wind, and frost—and often in the shadow of their ancestors. They are independent in their labor yet dependent on fluctuating global prices, available credit, and government policies.

Representing less than 2% of the population, farmers are now more iconic than real in American life. While politicians of all ideological stripes extol the virtues of the family farm, as a group farmers have been forsaken. Literature and Film of Agriculture is a two-week Wintersession course that explores the treatment of food and farming in cinema and literature. We will view and discuss major Hollywood films, as well as documentaries, and selections from books and articles in an academic effort to understand the transition from reality to imagination in the history of the American farmer. We will consider long standing trends in the history of American agriculture, as well as the local food movement and 21st century urban agriculture.

How it Works

The class will run 9:00 -1:00, and that's a long time. So we will punctuate each session with breaks (a walk around the oval w/ time to get coffee), special guests, and student activities. I encourage you to bring plenty of snacks and the caffeinated beverage of your choice. We will keep this class lively, but I hand you the responsibility to keep yourself hydrated, caloric, and alert. Please take that responsibility seriously.

Each day we will have a brief background lecture (if there's a film) and I will run through my comments on the readings as well. We will watch a film, or films most days and have a group discussion about readings everyday. We will often follow the film or book discussion with a panel of community experts or small group activities. We will attempt to conceptually stitch together the films, and the readings. On the closing day we will view student trailers and listen to book pitch ideas.

Grading

Students are responsible for viewing and discussing each film with the class and reading the assigned selections. At the close of the 2nd week students will have 2 projects due:

1.)The Notebook.

Come to class with one quote from the day's reading you feel especially is especially powerful. Write this quote down. We may make use of your quote in our group discussion. Each day take notes on the films and the discussions. After class, type up a reconstructed, and fully coherent version of your notes for the day, drawing conclusions and showing some personal insights. You should be able to do this in 1 to 1 ½ single spaced pages. Put this highly-readable piece of writing in a notebook. Use humor, vulnerability, active verbs in active tense, diverse sentence lengths, do not pander, gush, or use words I don't know. You should have 9 distinct entries. Then, at the end of our time together, write three more single spaced pages stitching as much of the notebook together as you can. That means choosing a theme and showing how some of the readings and films speak to that theme. You don't have to include every film or every reading. Do a good job. The Notebook is due Monday the 27th. I will put a box in EVST.

1.) The Movie

In small groups students will create a 90-second to two-minute trailer for a proposed farming film. These can be documentaries or fictional dramas. The groups should speak on why this film should be made, and then show the trailer.

3.) The Book Pitch

On the last day be prepared to present to your group a pitch for your food/farming book. It can be fiction, journalism, creative non-fiction, poetry whatever you like. Treat them like they represent a publishing company and have come to hear you out. Tell them a bit about the book, and then read aloud a 500 word sample (less if its poems). The hand-in on the book pitch is one paragraph describing the book then the 500 word sample.

Each of the three projects is worth 33 points. Attendance is mandatory as this is such a short course.

Books:

Cooked, by Michael Pollan

Epitaph for a Peach, by Mas Masumota

Book Selections, poems and articles will be on reserve.

Course Schedule:

Thursday 1/9

Pick up books and articles.

Assign reading "Epitaph for a Peach" (pp. 5-68)

Assign Pot Luck Lunch for 1/10

Schedule

Brief lecture: "Civic Agriculture is So Much More Than Food; How About in Detroit?"

View Film Detropia

break

View film Urban Roots

Break

Discuss films

break

12:15-1:00 Special guest: Sam Plotkin: Hipstahs, gangstahs, and arugula in D'town

Friday 1/10:

Readings: Epitaph for a Peach (pp. 5-68)

Assign Epitaph for a Peach (pp. 69 – 194) for 1/11

Pot Luck food for 1/13

Schedule

Discuss Epitaph for Peach (pp. 5-68)

break

Brief lecture – Agricultural Consolidation and the Modern Food Economy

Films: Our Daily Bread, and Food Inc.

Convene groups for class projects

Mon 1/13:

Readings: Epitaph for a Peach (pp. 69- 194)

Assign Epitaph for a Peach (pp.195-234), for 1/14 and student questions for exercise on 1/14 (ask an orchardist)

Schedule:

Discuss Epitaph for a Peach (pp. 69- 194)

break

Brief Lecture: The Social Power of Food and the Making of "Big Night"

Think of questions for restaurateurs

View Film: Big Night

Pot Luck Lunch!

12:00: Guests for discussion: Bob Marshall, Scott Gill, Christine Littig

Tues 1/14:

Readings: Epitaph for a Peach, (pp.195-234), by Mas Masumoto

Assign "Cooked" (pp. 1-24)

Schedule:

Brief Lecture; The Perilous work of fruit

9:45 Break

10-10:30 Discuss Epitaph for a Peach, (pp.195-234)

10:30 – 11:30 Student Activity based on book

11:30 – 12:00 break

12:00 Orchardist Book Club! Special guests, Tom and Lynn of Forbidden Fruit peach orchard, and Dave and Kathy of Sophie's garlic (orchard)

Wed 1/15 :

Readings Cooked pp. (1-24)

Assign Cooked pp. (25-122)

Schedule:

Discussion: Cooked pp.1-25

Break

lecture: The Local Food Movement, and Josh's riveting story

break

View Film – Greenhorns

Discussion, create questions for young farmers

break

12:00 Panel discussion with young farmers:

Margaret and Tracy, Micah and Katie, Nicole

Thursday 1/16:

Readings: Cooked pp. 25 -122

Assign: Cooked 123-202 for 1/17:

Readings to be discussed/workshopped - Selections from: Goatsong, by Brad Kessler; Farming; a Handbook, by Wendell Berry; Handspan of Red Earth; An Anthology of American Farm Poems, by Catherine Marconi; Homefarm, by Josh Slotnick

Schedule:

Brief Lecture: Goatsong by Brad Kessler, and agricultural language

Small groups will workshop specific poems

Break

Small groups present on poems

Break

12:00 Sheryl Noethe exercise

Friday 1/17:

Readings: Cooked (pp. 123-202)

Fracking is Inevitable", by Randy Udall and "North Dakota's Fracking Boom", by Richard Manning

Assign Cooked (pp. 203-290) for 1/21

Schedule:

Cooked Discussion (pp. 123-202)

break

Brief Lecture on fracking and the film
View film: Promised Land
break

12-1 Special Guest, Richard Manning

Monday 1/20 **MLK Holiday No Class**

Tuesday 1/21:

Readings Cooked pp. 203-290

Assign Cooked (pp.291 -404) for 1/22

Schedule:

How the class will work

Form groups for projects

Brief Lecture: The Farm Crisis of the 70's and 80's

Film: Country

break

Panel Discussion with Steve Elliott and Luci Brieger of Lifeline Produce

Wednesday 1/22:

Readings: Cooked (pp. 291-404)

Schedule

small group project work

break

lecture/discussion on Cooked (pp. 291-404)

break

Student exercise on book

break

12:00 Guest Book Club: Greg Price, Jeremy Smith, Laurie Bridgeman

Thurs 1/23:

Student Book Pitches and Movie Trailers