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ENST 580.01: The Politics of Food

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ENST 580 THE POLITICS OF FOOD
Fall 2018, Mondays and Wednesdays 3:00 – 4:20
Liberal Arts Building Room 138

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"

Facilitator: Neva Hassanein, Professor, Environmental Studies, 101A Rankin Hall

Contact info. (email is best): neva.hassanein@umontana.edu Phone: 243-6271 (o); 543-3635 (c)

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: Mondays 1-2 and Wednesdays 10:30-12:30. 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 distributes food is contested terrain. Indeed, a wide 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 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. These actors – governmental entities, businesses, institutions, and organizations – create and try to influence food policy. Understanding these dynamics – the social forces of the market, the state, and civil society – requires an exploration of the historical development of agriculture in the United States (a model that has been exported to other nations), the structure of the industrial system, and alternative agri-food movements.

Through a selection of interdisciplinary scholarship, often referred to today 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 food and sustainable ag 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 research skills and your understanding of policy analysis and social change.

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; some of the major structural issues in the dominant food system (e.g., concentration of economic power, migrant labor); and questions surrounding sustainability.
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, response paper, and discussion.
5. To develop research skills and increase substantive knowledge through a term paper assignment
6. To improve presentation skills by sharing the major findings of your term research project.

Accessing the Readings

The readings (see schedule) will be posted on our Moodle site for this course. Our Moodle site also contains, at the top, a section with the syllabus, resources, and assignments. In addition, there is one required book:

Holmes, Seth M. 2013. *Fresh Fruit, Broken Bodies: Migrant Farmworkers in the United States*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Requirements and Opportunities

Class participation (10%): 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. 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:

- 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.
- Jotting down notes as you read will help you engage with the material rather than read it at a superficial level. Writing often helps clarify your thinking, and make you a more constructive contributor to discussions.
- 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. If you are sick, please take care of yourself and minimize the spread of germs.

Reading response and discussion facilitation: To facilitate a level of participation and analysis appropriate to a graduate-level seminar, once during the term, each student will prepare a reading response to the required set of readings for a particular day. I will ask you to sign up for these opportunities to shape our group discussion. The written response should be around 1-2 pages, and include:

1. A complete citation for each reading at the top of the page;
2. A summary of the major points of each reading (in your own words);
3. An analysis of the reading(s), making specific references to passages. For instance, you may want to:
 - articulate key theoretical or empirical insights and/or political positions suggested by the reading.
 - you may want to explain why you agree or disagree with the author(s).
 - or you may want to make comparisons among the various ideas in the readings assigned for that day (perhaps referencing works we read earlier or that you have engaged with elsewhere).
4. Raise at least two discussion questions. You may want to:
 - pose questions that help us clarify the key concepts or main argument(s) made in the readings,
 - ask us to grapple with issues you raised in your response (#3) above,
 - identify portions that were difficult for you to understand and why.

Send your response to the entire class using the QuickMail function in Moodle by 4 PM the night before the reading is due in class (so Sunday night by 4 for Monday class sessions; Tuesday night by 4 for Wednesday class sessions). You are encouraged to post them earlier than that if you can. Please plan accordingly. In class, you will briefly present your response paper summary, analysis, and questions. We will use these to help us guide our discussion, with the author of the response paper playing a strong role in facilitation.

Analytic Essays (60%): Three 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 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 (30%): 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. There are three options for the final term project, each of which are described separately. These include:

- A. Literature review.
- B. Policy analysis.
- C. Commodity chain analysis.

The topic is up to you, but I encourage you to focus as much as possible. To help you with this, I ask you to submit a proposal by Sept. 17; approx. 200 words and include a preliminary bibliography of at least five clearly relevant sources. I will also create some time during class sessions for you to share your ideas and directions with your colleagues. I encourage you to utilize my office hours to discuss your projects.

Deadlines:

- A proposal is due **September 17**. In about 200 words explain the topic that interests you and why. Attach a preliminary bibliography of at least five relevant sources.
- Term papers due by 5 pm in my mailbox in Rankin on **Tuesday, December 11**.
- Essay #1 is due **Sept. 26**; essay #2 is due **Oct. 15**; essay #3 is due **November 19**.

AERO Meeting: All participants in this course are invited to attend the annual meeting of the Alternative Energy Resources Organization (AERO) in Missoula. 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. See more information on the Schedule – October 26-28.

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

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:	Percent of Grade
Participation, reading response, discussion leader	10
Three analytic essays	60
Term Project - Proposal	N/A
Term Project - Presentation	10
Term Project - Paper	20
	100% total