

SOC 562: Sociology of Food Systems and Agriculture Spring 2017

Professor: Joshua Sbicca, PhD

Class Meeting Time: Tuesday (3:30-6:20PM)

Class Location: Clark Building – B252

Office Location: Clark Building – B265

Office Hours: Wednesday (3:30-5:00PM) and Thursday (3:30-5:00 PM) or by appointment

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Course Description

“Food is necessary for human survival.” We hear this hackneyed axiom regularly. But what does this mean? In and of itself, it masks the social with an appeal to the biological and overlooks the ecological as an invisible prerequisite. In the spirit, therefore, of unmasking the complexities of the food system, this course will delve into why food matters to society beyond the obvious need for sustenance. We will investigate the economic, political, and social underpinnings and outcomes of food and agricultural systems. We will also consider ecological entanglements, one of the many dialectics driving our collective inquiry this semester. These socioecological intersections and assemblages are significant in a context of widespread food system problems. Turn on the television or dive down some web portal and you are inundated with a barrage of information and lurking ideologies meant to sway your perspective on such matters. Debates rage over how to amply remunerate food chain workers, stave off the environmental degradation associated with industrial capitalist agriculture, use mechanical- and bio-technologies, solve global hunger and obesity, respect cultural foodways and culinary traditions, reimagine gendered divisions of food labor, re-center the production of food within cities, and on and on. At the same time, food-based social movements are drawing connections between food systems and class, race, and gender inequities in order to confront, reform, and transform capitalism, neoliberalism, institutionalized racism, and patriarchy. In brief, we will study the matrices of power that weave their way through and into food. Engaging in this learning process will foster a deeper sociological imagination into social change as it pertains to food and agricultural systems. Topically, food is noteworthy. Sociologically, food systems become an analytical framework for understanding the uneven relationship people have with this vital life source. Roll up your sleeves and dig in. You are about to cultivate new insights and tools to unpack the ongoing transformation of food and agricultural systems.

Course Expectations

The quality of this seminar depends greatly on active participation and preparedness. I expect that you attend each weekly seminar having read and taken notes on required readings, and started to critically grapple with the main ideas. We all come to the seminar with different life experiences, academic training, and intellectual insights. The more we are primed to engage each week, the richer our discussions will be and the more focused our unique engagement with the content. As a seminar full of learners in different intellectual places, I will work to channel this into productive directions. To enrich your knowledge and prepare you to be conversant in sociological and related disciplinary insights into food and agricultural systems, I expect you this semester to:

- 1) Read sociological/sociologically rich texts that explore some of the major academic and public debates on food systems and agriculture.
- 2) Write sociologically about food and agricultural systems, relying on empirical evidence and theoretical rigor.
- 3) Present key arguments, debates, and evidence from weekly readings in seminar discussions.
- 4) Engage in critical but respectful debate with the authors we read, fellow seminar takers, and me.

Learning Outcomes

- 1) Understand and articulate the sociological and related disciplinary insights into the organization and outcomes associated with food and agricultural systems.
- 2) Develop critical theoretical analyses of the social, historical, and geographical forces that influence and intersect with food and agriculture.
- 3) Apply a range of methodological and empirical approaches to unpack human/food relations.
- 4) Develop tools to dissect power relations between food-based social movements and countermovements in the context of systems of domination (e.g. white supremacy, imperialism) and exploitation (e.g. capitalism, slavery)
- 5) Strengthen your critical thinking and be able to apply an improved sociological imagination to historical and contemporary conflicts over food and agricultural systems.
- 6) Cultivate analytic, discussion, public speaking, research, and writing skills.

Reading Requirements

The required readings are a combination of books (we will read most or all of each book) and selected articles or chapters. Below are the books that you need to purchase and instructions for accessing the readings.

- Alkon, Alison and Julian Agyeman. *Cultivating Food Justice: Race, Class, and Sustainability*
- Barnard, Alex. *Freegans: Diving into the Wealth of Food Waste in America*
- Ganz, Marshall. *Why David Sometimes Wins: Leadership, Organization, and Strategy in the California Farm Worker Movement*
- Guthman, Julie. *Weighing In: Obesity, Food Justice, and the Limits of Capitalism*
- Hatch, Anthony Ryan. *Blood Sugar: Racial Pharmacology and Food Justice in Black America*
- Holmes, Seth. *Fresh Fruit, Broken Bodies: Migrant Farmworkers in the United States*
- Howard, Philip. *Concentration and Power in the Food System: Who Controls What We Eat?*
- Longo, Stefano, Rebecca Clausen, and Brett Clark. *The Tragedy of the Commodity: Oceans, Fisheries, and Aquaculture*
- Pellow, David. *Total Liberation: The Power and Promise of Animal Rights and the Radical Earth Movement*
- Ribas, Vanesa. *On the Line: Slaughterhouse Lives and the Making of the New South*
- Winders, Bill. *The Politics of Food Supply: U.S. Agricultural Policy in the World Economy*

To access electronic readings:

- 1) Go to Canvas for our class: <http://info.canvas.colostate.edu/login.aspx>
- 2) Once in Canvas go to “Files” on the left hand side of the page.
- 3) You will see a number of folders with different labels. Any electronic readings will be in the “Readings” folder.
- 4) My suggestion is to save all the PDFs to your computer. They are named so that you can easily find the required readings for a particular week. Just make sure to cross-reference the syllabus with the file names.

Assignments

Reading Reactions and Participation – 30%

It is imperative that you come to each seminar period ready to discuss the readings. Although I will not keep strict attendance or count how many times you speak in class, I will observe your level of engagement and will consider this at the end of the semester. The quality of our seminar will directly reflect the work you put in every week. In order to maximize participation, I expect you to complete readings before the seminar, jot down your own personal notes, and create discussion questions.

In particular, from week 2 through week 14, you need to write a two-page reaction to the readings. Do not summarize. Instead, focus on a **theoretical insight** or **argument** that you consider significant. Explain why you consider this important, whether you agree or disagree, and the reasoning behind your conclusions. **Due weekly. Bring to seminar.**

Additionally, write two discussion questions. Include these at the end of your reaction. These questions should explore the readings' major contributions, significant weaknesses, and/or connections to other readings. **Email your questions to the seminar facilitator for that week by Monday at midnight.**

Seminar Facilitation – 30%

Every student will lead and facilitate discussion for an entire class period. While I will always offer insights, mini-lectures, clarification, and/or expertise during our seminars, I expect that the facilitator be prepared to do it alone. To facilitate the seminar effectively there are a few things I would like you to do. **Print out the compiled list of student generated questions and bring this to the seminar.** These questions will help you structure the overall discussion and bring in the voices of your classmates. Present a 15-minute summary of the readings. Do not begin to analyze or critique the readings at this stage. Instead, focus on the major arguments and key points. This will provide the foundation for the seminar upon which we will collectively interrogate the readings further.

Research Paper – 30%, Prospectus – 5%, Presentation – 5%

You are required to write a 20-25 page research paper. Before you undertake this paper, **you need to meet with me during my office hours within the first four weeks.** Additionally, you will write a two-page prospectus discussing your plans for your research paper. **Due February 14.** Chances are that you are currently working on or thinking about a thesis, dissertation, or research project. My hope is that you use this opportunity to further a project that advances your academic or professional trajectory. **You will give a 15 minute presentation on this research paper during the last seminar of the semester.**

The paper must take one of three forms and draw on the theoretical and sociological insights at the heart of this course. **Due May 7.**

Research proposal. In addition to proposing to understand an innovative or theoretically promising aspect of food and agricultural systems, this option requires you to introduce your topic, develop a thorough literature review, a clear and appropriate methodology, and expected findings. This is a good option if you want to think through everything that you need to undertake a new project.

Theoretically driven research paper. For this option, you need to pick a particular food or agricultural problem, a food based social movement, an instance of economic, political, or social conflict around food or agriculture, or a power struggle over an inequity in the food system. Make sure to outline briefly your topic. Then pick a theoretical framework to analyze the topic. The majority of the paper needs to explain the theoretical framework and why it is useful to analyze your topic, as well as an application of the theory to the topic.

Empirical research paper. Unlike the theory paper, this paper requires that you carry out some kind of empirically based research. This could be a quantitative analysis using a preexisting dataset, content analysis of a food movement struggle, a comparative case study, or a sociologically informed historical analysis of some aspect of food and agricultural systems or movements. I anticipate that empirics more than theory will drive this paper.

Assignment Standards

Assignments need to be double-spaced, 12-point, Times New Roman font, with one-inch margins. Please include name of assignment, date, and your name. Use the American Sociological Association standards of citation. Here are citation details: <http://www.calstatela.edu/library/guides/3asa.pdf> I will assist any student who needs help. Another great library resource in sociology can be found at: <http://libguides.colostate.edu/sociology>. For assistance with writing go to CSU's Writing Studio: <http://writing.colostate.edu/>.

LATE WORK REQUIRES OFFICIAL DOCUMENTATION TO RECEIVE FULL POINTS. Otherwise, I take off 5% of the final grade for each day that it is late.

Grades and Point System*

94 – 100	A	Reading Reactions and Participation –	30%
90 – 93	A-	Seminar Facilitation –	30%
87 – 89	B+	Research Prospectus –	5%
83 – 86	B	Research Paper –	30%
80 – 82	B-	Presentation –	5%
76 – 79	C+	Total =	100%
70 – 75	C		
60 – 69	D		
59 and below	F		

* Information on current CSU grading policies for assigning grade points, incomplete grades and other information: <http://registrar.colostate.edu/faculty-grades>.

Academic Integrity

This course will adhere to the CSU Academic Integrity Policy as found in the [General Catalog - 1.6, pages 7-9](#) and the [Student Conduct Code](#). At a minimum, violations will result in a grading penalty in this course and a report to the Office of Conflict Resolution and Student Conduct Services. Remember that the CSU Honor Code states: *As a student at Colorado State University, I recognize my active role in building a Campus of Character. This includes my commitment to honesty, integrity, and responsibility within the campus community. As such, I will refrain from acts of academic misconduct.* It is in the interest of learning and skill development that students do all their own work, and refrain from cheating, plagiarism, unauthorized possession or dispossession of academic materials, falsification, and facilitation.

Disabilities Statement

If you are a student who will need accommodations in this class, please let me know early in the semester so that your learning needs may be appropriately met. Any accommodation must be discussed in a timely manner prior to implementation. You may also want to contact Resources for Disabled Students. Phone: 970-491-6385. <http://www.colostate.edu/Depts/RDS/>.

Religious Holidays

Colorado State University has a legal and moral obligation to accommodate all students who must be absent from classes in order to observe religious holidays. You will not be penalized for missing class due to religious observance. You are responsible for notifying me in advance of any conflicts.

Weekly Readings (*on Canvas or ^Library e-book)	Assignments & Holidays
<p align="center">Week 1 – January 17 Introduction</p> <p>*Carolan (2016)</p>	
<p align="center">Week 2 – January 24 Political Economy of Food: Class, State, Policy Dialectics</p> <p>^<i>The Politics of Food Supply</i> – Winders</p>	
<p align="center">Week 3 – January 31 Political Economy of Food: Capital as Power</p> <p><i>Concentration and Power in the Food System</i> – Howard</p>	
<p align="center">Weeks 4 – February 7 Political Economy of Food: Social Metabolism</p> <p><i>The Tragedy of the Commodity</i> – Longo, Clausen, & Clark</p>	
<p align="center">Week 5 – February 14 Race in the Food System: Racial Formation and Racial Projects</p> <p>*<i>Racial Formation in the United States</i> – Omi and Winant (Ch. 4) ^<i>Cultivating Food Justice</i> – Alkon and Agyeman (Ch. 2-5)</p>	<p align="center">Research Prospectus Due 2/14</p>
<p align="center">Week 6 – February 21 Food Labor: Migrants on the Farm</p> <p>^<i>Fresh Fruit Broken Bodies</i> – Holmes</p>	
<p align="center">Week 7 – February 28 Food Labor: Race and Ethnic Relations in the Factory</p> <p>^<i>On the Line</i> – Ribas</p>	
<p align="center">Week 8 – March 7 Consuming Food: Diet, Science, and Medicine I</p> <p><i>Blood Sugar</i> – Hatch</p>	
<p align="center">SPRING BREAK – March 11-19</p>	
<p align="center">Week 9 – March 21 Consuming Food: Diet, Science, and Medicine II</p> <p><i>Weighing In</i> – Guthman</p>	
<p align="center">Week 10 – March 28 Food Movements: Local, Global, Reform or Transform?</p> <p>*Kloppenborg, Hendrickson, and Stevenson (1996) *Hinrichs (2003) *Allen et al. (2003) *Pudup (2008) *Levkoe and Wakefield (2014) ^<i>Cultivating Food Justice</i> – Alkon and Agyeman (Ch. 14)</p>	

<p style="text-align: center;">Week 11 – April 4 Food Justice: Labor Struggles <i>^Why David Sometimes Wins – Ganz</i></p>	
<p style="text-align: center;">Week 12 – April 11 Food Justice: Anti-Racism and Racial Justice <i>*“Food Justice Racial Projects” – Sbicca and Myers (2016)</i> <i>^Cultivating Food Justice – Alkon and Agyeman (Ch. 7-10)</i></p>	
<p style="text-align: center;">Week 13 – April 18 Food Justice: Anti/Post-Capitalism <i>^Freegans – Barnard</i></p>	
<p style="text-align: center;">Week 14 – April 25 Beyond Food: Revolutionizing Human/Nature Relations <i>Total Liberation – Pellow</i></p>	
<p style="text-align: center;">Week 15 – May 2 Presentations 15 minute Student Presentations on Research Paper</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Research Paper Due May 7</p>

Course Bibliography

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Allen, Patricia, Margaret FitzSimmons, Michael Goodman, and Keith Warner. 2003. "Shifting plates in the agrifood landscape: the tectonics of alternative agrifood initiatives in California." *Journal of Rural Studies*. 19(1): 61-75.

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Winders, Bill. 2012. *The Politics of Food Supply: U.S. Agricultural Policy in the World Economy*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.