

Agriculture, Food, & Society

SOC 489

TR

2:00-3:50

Spring 2016

GTM 219

Louisiana

Tech

University

3 Credits



Farmer's Markets have become very popular in the last two decades as places for consumers to obtain locally-produced food, talk with producers, and engage in alternative market dynamics. This is the summer farmer's market in Amherst, MA, set up in a parking lot in the middle of town. What are the benefits and challenges associated with this form of food consumption?

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Ever wonder why Americans eat like they do? How is it possible to have fresh strawberries, tomatoes, and lettuce even in the dead of winter? Why does organic food cost so much more than non-organic food? What's behind that cup of coffee or tea or bottle of soda you drink? Just what is "fair trade"? And what is all this buzz about eating locally?

In this course we will work to answer some of these questions. This course is designed to introduce students to the sociology of food and agriculture in the U.S. We will consider the dominant trends in U.S. agriculture; some of the emerging alternatives, politics, and responses to these trends; and the social, economic, and health impacts of different types of agrifood practices. Along the way we'll talk about how these dominant and alternative food systems work, for whom they work, and for whom they don't work. Eating, one of the most basic acts a person does, is actually tied to a host of complex issues.

Note that this is an upper-level seminar-style course. This means you can expect a lot of reading as well as a fair amount of writing. You will also be expected to participate fully in class discussions (which will be hard to do if you haven't done the assigned reading).

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Course Goals...

I have three goals for the course:

- Increase your sociological literacy as related to the subject of food and agriculture
- Develop your sociological imaginations as related to food and agriculture
- Sharpen your critical thinking skills

...and Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course you should be able to:

- Describe major trends in U.S. agriculture
- Evaluate the ability of alternative agrifood movements (i.e., organic, local food, fair trade) to challenge major trends in U.S. agriculture
- Identify and evaluate the community impacts of different types of agrifood practices
- Identify and understand the extent and importance of the social aspects of food systems
- Interpret and evaluate food system information from a sociological perspective.

Acknowledgements

This syllabus was designed utilizing related course syllabi provided directly or indirectly by Michael Bell, Jim Bingen, Gil Gillespie, Jessica Goldberger, Neva Hassanein, Jack Kloppenburg, and Hannah Wittman.

Reflections: You will write reflection papers on at least five of the eight reading units. They are meant to help you be better prepared for class and should be 500-750 words with two general parts:

1. Start with a very brief (one paragraph max) summary (hint: aim for broad themes over specific details).
2. Analyze what you've read in light of other sociological theories you know, personal experience, and (as the course progresses) other readings we've done. This should comprise the bulk of your reflection (at least 80%). If you have trouble getting started, guided reading questions are included, though you are not required to use them.

Reflections are due via Moodle by **noon on**

Tuesday as we enter a new unit (So the reflection due for Week 1: Food & Farming Today, is due by March 15). I do not dock points on reflections for spelling or grammar mistakes, however you should take care to write as clearly as you can (if I can't understand it, then I can't grade it).

Reflections are marked out of 5 points each and I will post grades each week on Moodle. You may complete extra to make up for missed points.

Course Texts

Pollan, Michael. 2006. *The Omnivore's Dilemma*. New York: Penguin Books.

Other readings will be posted on Moodle.

Evaluations & Assignments

Course Participation	20%
Reflections	25%
Final Exam	25%
Food Systems Project	30%
TOTAL	100%

Grading scale:

A	90-100	Grades are rounded to the nearest whole number
B	80-89	
C	70-79	
D	60-69	
F	0-59	

Course Participation: Student participation is essential for this course to be successful. This starts with everyone completing the reading before class and extends into being actively involved during class time. I will run this course in a seminar format: lectures will be minimal and discussion is encouraged. You should be ready to take notes every class, have access to the readings (if possible), and your comments in class should build upon what other students (or I) have said and help move the conversation forward. You should ask questions when you don't understand things and even if you don't say much your body language should indicate attention and engagement.

Obviously, you have to be present to earn participation points. I will only adjust the participation portion of your grade for days with documented and university-sanctioned excuses (i.e., illness, family emergency, university-related travel).

Food Systems Project: There are a few options for your "term paper" component. I suspect most of you will do a Commodity Systems Analysis (described further on p. 4 and in the Appendix). I would like one of you to inventory local and state (and regional) ag leaders and organizations; this is to benefit the Ruston Farmers Market. And a few of you may want to develop a regional food guide. Regardless, this will include a final report (15%), a presentation on May 17 (10%), and at least one check-in April 12 (5%).

Menu: Course Schedule Overview

Appetizers: Introduction and Overview

Mar 15	Food & Farming Today	Mar 17	Commodity Systems Analysis
		We will have an optional class-wide fast from Mar 16-18. I will host a potluck to break the fast that Friday (the 18 th).	

First Course: Problems in Food & Agriculture

Mar 22	Food Consumption	Mar 24	Food Scavenger Hunt
Mar 29	Food Production I: Industrialization	Mar 31	Culinary Adventure Field Trip
Apr 5	Food Sustainability	Apr 7	Farm Visit Field Trip
Apr 12	Food Production II: GMOs, Inequality	Apr 14	Instructor at Conference: Commodity Analysis Workshop

Second Course: The Rise of Alternative Food Systems

Apr 19	Organic Food & Farming	Apr 21	Meats Lab Visit
Apr 26	Food Localization	Apr 28	Food Sustainability, Revisited

Desserts: Making Change in the Food System?

May 3	Food Culture of the Citizen Consumer	May 5	Challenges for the Future of Food
May 10	Obesity	May 12	Final Exam
May 17	Commodity Systems Analyses	May 19	Potluck

Notes on the Field Trips

We have five required field trips, designed to be both fun and engaging activities to help you get first-hand experience regarding some aspect of our food supply.

The first is a competition. I will divide you into teams and send you to Ruston grocery stores to find and price-check ingredients for a menu. We may run a little over class time this day, so plan accordingly.

Next we will go to Monroe to sample cuisines from around the world in a progressive dinner. You will each be assigned a food item to research and present to others. In order to leave right at 2:00, please arrive a few minutes early at the parking lot on the south side of GTM (*opposite* the railroad tracks). We should be back by about 7 PM.

We will take the same departure strategy for our Farm Visit. Wear comfortable clothes you don't mind getting dirty, as we're going to help the farmers plant crops. We'll also have the chance to slaughter a chicken. We should be back by 5 PM.

Wear close-toed shoes (and bring a jacket) to visit the Meats Lab on south campus. We'll have time to stop at the Tech Farm Sales Room and still be back by 4 PM.

Our last trip is not on the chart above. On Saturday, May 7, we'll visit the Ruston Farmers Market as a group. While it runs 8 AM to noon, we'll aim to meet as a group around 10:00.

Class-Wide Fasting (Mar 16-18)

A class like this has potential to push our food experiences. One way to do this is through fasting. Many cultures throughout the world have references to fasting, or periods of intentionally going without food – usually in religious or spiritual contexts (though sometimes for health reasons as well). The experience becomes especially profound when done with others.

I invite you to join me on a three-day water-only fast from March 16-18. We will collectively break our fast (and share our experiences) shortly after sunset on Friday, March 18, with a simple potluck meal. While this may seem an extreme task, it is quite do-able and the benefits are profound. Several members of previous classes participated and all had positive things to say, though were also somewhat skeptical at first. Participation is entirely voluntary. Also, think carefully about this if you have any health conditions (such as diabetes) that may make going without food dangerous. If in doubt, consult your physician (I'm not that kind of doctor). There are alternative ways to participate for those who do not believe it safe to fast completely for three days; come talk to me if this describes your situation.

We may also watch Food, Inc. at the potluck; you are welcome to join us, even if you aren't fasting.

Reading List and Reflection Question Prompts

Week 1: Food & Farming Today

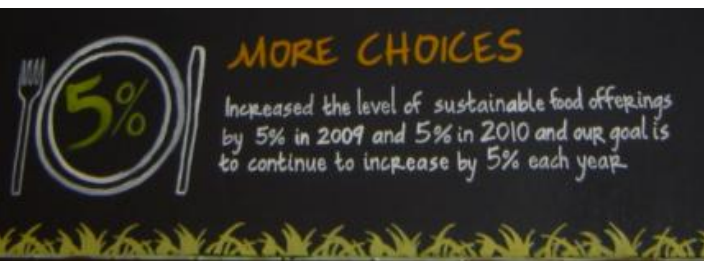
Lyson gives a good and quick history of the industrialization of agriculture (pay attention to his discussion of the three revolutions – after that you can skim) while the rest give us an overview of the state of food and farming in the U.S. (and world) today. Food Regimes (Lyson & Raymer 2000 and Pechlaner & Otero 2010) refer to the power dynamics endemic to the industrialization and consolidation of food production.

- Lyson, Thomas. 2004. "From subsistence to production", Chapter 2 in *Civic Agriculture: Reconnecting Farm, Food, and Community*. Medford, MA: Tufts University Press. [excerpts]
- Pollan, Michael. "Introduction: Our national eating disorder." Pp. 1-11 in *The Omnivore's Dilemma*.
- Lyson, Thomas A., & Annalisa Lewis Raymer. 2000. "Stalking the Wily Multinational: Power and Control in the U.S. Food System." *Agriculture and Human Values*. 17(2): 199-208.
- Pechlaner, Gabriela & Gerardo Otero. 2010. "The Neoliberal Food Regime: Neoregulation and the New Division of Labor in North America." *Rural Sociology* 75(2): 179-208.

- Friedland, William H. 2001. "Reprise on Commodity Systems Methodology." *International Journal of Sociology of Agriculture and Food* 9(1): 82-103.
- Reynolds, Laura T. 2009. "Mainstreaming Fair Trade Coffee: From Partnership to Traceability." *World Development* 37(6): 1083-1093.
- NPR's Morning Edition did an interesting story on caffeine extraction (Feb 26, 2016) that is a form of a commodity systems analysis.
<http://www.npr.org/sections/thesalt/2016/02/26/467844829/inside-the-anonymous-world-of-caffeine>

- ❖ Pollan says that the U.S., "drawn from many different immigrant populations, each with its own culture of food, [has] never had a single, strong, stable culinary tradition to guide us" (p. 5). What would you say constitutes U.S. food culture? On what do you base this answer?
- ❖ Part of Pollan's point in writing *The Omnivore's Dilemma* is to help us reconnect with our food supply and bring us back into connection with the earth that sustains us. In what ways would you say you are or are not currently connected with the food you eat?
- ❖ What should the role of the market be in large-scale decision-making?
- ❖ In what ways do the multinational food corporations Lyson and Raymer document exert power and control in the U.S. food system? In what ways might this be both positive and negative? If you could change the way these corporations' board operated, (how) would you do so?
- ❖ How would you define the term (neoliberal) food regime? In what ways are the multinational corporations that Lyson and Raymer discuss examples of the neoliberal food regime?
- ❖ Pechlaner and Otero argue (p. 203) that food vulnerability and resistance are the antithesis of the driving forces of the neoliberal food regime (neoregulation and corporate-drive biotechnology). In what ways is this statement true or not true? Based on their article, how might we combat the neoliberal food regime? What are some potential means of changing such a system?
- ❖ On p. 197 Pechlaner and Otero list a variety of measures and demands that "are at odds with the chief tenets of the neoliberal food regime." How are they at odds?

If you do the Commodity Systems Analysis for your Food Systems Project, you should read the article by Friedland (2001) before Thursday (Reynolds 2009 gives a good example; I have other examples I can point you to if you like). The basic idea is that you will select a food product available in two (or more) forms that differ from each other on at least one important dimension (e.g., locally produced/globally produced, conventional/organic, produced by a big company/produced by a small company, etc.). You will trace the two versions back through the various social and physical transformations they have undergone on the way to your mouth. The point is to explore the range of ways in which the two versions differ. Further details are in the Appendix.



Consider these signs, both taken from one of the dining halls at NYU's campus. What do they suggest about the food supply and our perceptions of that supply? What does it mean to "be sustainable"? Why are people concerned about this in the first place? This is a central theme of the course.



Week 2: Food Consumption: Social Issues in Food in the Modern US Diet

This week we consider problems consumers face in the modern industrial food system. These problems include questions of food safety, the rising obesity epidemic (particularly among children), and food security. [We'll actually cover obesity toward the term's end.]

- Montague, Peter. 2009. "Burden of Proof: The Precautionary Principle." *Multinational Monitor* 30: March/April, pp. 14-19. Available at: www.multinationalmonitor.org/mm2009/032009/interview-montague.html.
- DeLind, Laura, & Philip H. Howard. 2008. "Safe at any scale? Food scares, food regulation, and scaled alternatives." *Agriculture and Human Values* 25(3): 301-317.
- Blanchard, Troy C., & Todd L. Matthews. 2007. "Retail Concentration, Food Deserts, and Food-Disadvantaged Communities in Rural America." Pp. 201-215 in Hinrichs, Claire C. & Thomas A. Lyson, eds., *Remaking the North American Food System*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press.
 - Recommended: Chung, Chanjin & Samuel L. Myers, Jr. 1999. "Do the Poor Pay More for Food? An Analysis of Grocery Store Availability and Food Price Disparities." *Journal of Consumer Affairs* 33(2):276–96.
- ❖ Montague accuses the U.S. of illegally interfering with European precautionary policies. How might the reverse be true? How can European precautionary policies be seen as interference in U.S. policies and interests?
- ❖ DeLind and Howard argue for a need to view consumers as more than just consumers. How else might they be viewed?
- ❖ Food scares tend to elicit very individualized responses from the media, government, and industry. What sorts of responses (both generally and specifically) do DeLind and Howard propose would more effectively deal with these crises? What do you make of their solutions?
- ❖ What do you make of DeLind and Howard's quote on p. 314 that "A safer food system will require much more decentralization and democratic input than exists currently....Just as a little food poisoning is a good thing, a way of strengthening our individual and collective immune systems, a little civil disobedience is also a good thing – a way of strengthening our individual and collective political will"?
- ❖ How might the precautionary principle reorient our thinking toward food safety?
- ❖ Blanchard and Matthews identify U.S. food deserts and some of their main characteristics. Considering everything we've been reading about the modern food system, how might these deserts be remediated? Is a solution possible within the current system? If so, how?

Week 3: Food Production: The Industrialization of Food Part I

This week we take the first real plunge into *The Omnivore's Dilemma*. Don't be afraid of the number of pages; Pollan's writing style is very easy and accessible. For most of you this material will go quickly and be easily digestible (get it, digestible?). We'll spend this week getting the lay of the land with what modern-day agriculture looks like, as well as talking a bit in class about food and farming here in Louisiana.

- Pollan, Michael. "Section I – Industrial: Corn" Pp. 15-119 in *The Omnivore's Dilemma*.
 - ❖ Has corn "succeeded in domesticating us," as Pollan suggests (p. 23)? In what ways does this (and the ensuing discussion on coevolution and corn's "evolutionary strategy") anthropomorphize plants and deemphasize human activity? Does such a plant-centric focus obscure or sharpen the links between food and society? How?
 - ❖ How have political, social, economic, and biological factors combined to promote corn monocropping? How has this impacted farmers in the U.S.?
 - ❖ What is the difference for farms between loans and direct payment? What is the impact of each for the consumer?
 - ❖ At the end of this section, Pollan argues that our society's incredible focus and reliance on corn for so much of the overall food supply is only a positive thing for a very select few people (and even for some of them – like those on the lower rungs of America's economic ladder – there are ultimately more costs than benefits). What do you make of this claim? Has the rise of cheap corn been as problematic and destructive as he suggests or are there benefits he is avoiding?



Urban farming in Denver, CO. Note the mix of run-down and upscale buildings in the background. How might inner-city farming both solve and exacerbate the problem of food deserts? Are there other forces that may be at play in such developments?
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Week 4: Food Sustainability

Logically, this week's material may seem a little out of order. But with our Farm Visit field trip this week, there's a few things I want to be sure we've covered in class first. The term "sustainability" has become a hot one these days, and that remains true when we're talking about food. Just what is sustainable agriculture?

- Pollan, Michael. "Section II – Pastoral: Grass" Pp. 123-273 in *The Omnivore's Dilemma*. [skip Chapter 9]
- Ikerd, John. 2014. "The Failure of Industrial Agriculture; The Path to a Sustainable Future." Visit: <http://web.missouri.edu/ikerdj/papers/Omaha%20%20-%20Failure%20of%20Industrial%20Agriculture.htm>.

- ❖ As you read, take note of how each author defines (directly or implicitly) sustainable agriculture. What do you see as common? What is different? What is included or excluded? What is missing? Based on the readings, how would you define sustainable agriculture?
- ❖ Ikerd says we must define sustainable agriculture for the concept to have utility, yet in the end doesn't actually define it. Does his approach make sense? How does it aid us in thinking about how to build more sustainable agricultural systems? How does it not?

Week 6: Organic Food and Farming

As we learned when reading *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, organic food is not the straight-forward solution to the problems of the modern food system that many think it to be. This week we'll consider this issue in more detail by examining some of the problems and promises in organic food production.

- Pollan, Michael. Chapter 9.
- Jaffee, Daniel, & Philip H. Howard. 2010. "Corporate Cooptation of Organic and Fair Trade Standards." *Agriculture and Human Values* 27(4): 387-399.
- Obach, Brian K. 2007. "Theoretical Interpretations of the Growth in Organic Agriculture: Agricultural Modernization or an Organic Treadmill?" *Society and Natural Resources* 20(3): 229-244.
- Raynolds, Laura T. 2004. "The Globalization of Organic Agro-Food Networks." *World Development* 32(5): 725-743. [Skip Section 2]
- Guptill, Amy. 2009. "Exploring the Conventionalization of Organic Dairy: Trends and Counter-trends in Upstate New York." *Agriculture and Human Values* 26(1-2): 29-42. [skim methods section]

Week 5: Food Production: The Industrialization of Food Part II

The industrialization of food is a big topic, so it makes sense that we get another week on the topic, this time focusing in on a few questions raised about the ultimate impacts and outcomes of this approach to food production. This week we will ask two broad questions: 1) What role does biotechnology play in ensuring our food supply (see Shapiro 1999 and Howard 2003)? 2) What are the intersections of race and class in meat processing plants (in rural areas; see Kandel 2006)?

- Heffernan, William D. 1997. "Agro/Food System." Pp. 46-51 in Goreham, G., ed., *Encyclopedia of Rural America*. Millerton, NY: Grey House Publishing.
- Shapiro, Robert B. 1999. "How genetic engineering will save our planet." *The Futurist* 33(4): 28-29.
- Howard, Philip H. 2003. "Killer Tomatoes versus Golden Rice: The Social Context of Genetic Engineering." *The Cultivar* (Newsletter of the Center for Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems, University of California, Santa Cruz) 21(1): 5-7.
- Kandel, William. 2006. "Meat-Processing Firms Attract Hispanic Workers to Rural America." *Amber Waves* 4(3). Economic Research Service, USDA. Available at: <http://www.ers.usda.gov/AmberWaves/June06/Features/MeatProcessing.htm>

- ❖ What is the relationship between farm scale and rural communities? What forces (may) mitigate that relationship?
- ❖ What social forces (structural or otherwise) have led to the way our meat industry is currently organized? What are some of the outcomes of this organization (broadly)?
- ❖ What role does biotechnology play in ensuring our food supply? Or does it play a role?

Questions for Organic Unit (Week 6):

- ❖ How does organic food offer a sustainable alternative to the conventional supply? How does it not?
- ❖ What forces have led to the widespread expansion of organic food?
- ❖ What are the implications of the global expansion and trade in organic? What are the benefits of such a global trade? What are the problems?
- ❖ How is the global production and trade in organic goods like the conventional global food system? How is it not?
- ❖ Are you surprised by Raynold's findings? Why or why not?
- ❖ Howard argues that reversing this consolidation trend will be difficult and Raynolds would seem to agree. Further, should the trend be reversed or are there things to be gained from consolidation? Justify your answer.
- ❖ Based on your reading of Guptill's article, is organic dairy production conventionalized? Explain.

Week 7: Food Localization

We now turn to the component of this quarter's project that is nearest and dearest to my heart. Local food has been hailed by many as *the* best solution to the problems of our modern food system (see Peters *et al* 2008). But as other authors for this week point out, in turning toward the local, we must be mindful that we don't perpetuate many of the same social inequalities such a food system is credited to solve.

- Peters, Christian J., Nelson L. Bills, Jennifer L. Wilkins, & Gary W. Fick. 2008. "Foodshed analysis and its relevance to sustainability." *Renewable Agriculture and Food Systems* 24(1): 1–7.
- Schnell, Steven M. 2013. "Food Miles, Local Eating, and Community Supported Agriculture: Putting Local Food in Its Place." *Agriculture and Human Values* 30(4): 615-628.
- Macias, Thomas. 2008. "Working toward a just, equitable, and local food system: the social impact of community-based agriculture." *Social Science Quarterly* 89(5): 1086-1101.
- And pick one of the following:
 - Trivette, Shawn A. 2012. "Close to Home: The Drive for Local Food." *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*. 3(1): 161-180. [skim 1st 3 pages]
 - DeLind, Laura. 2011. "Are local foods and the local food movement taking us where we want to go? Or are we hitching our wagons to the wrong stars?" *Agriculture and Human Values* 28(2): 273-283.
 - Born, Branden & Mark Purcell. 2006. "Avoiding the Local Trap." *Journal of Planning and Research* 26(2): 195-207.
- ❖ In what ways does local food offer a sustainable alternative to the conventional supply? In what ways does it not?
- ❖ Considering the limitations of localizing agricultural production toward solving the climate-energy puzzle, what benefit does localizing food supplies have toward remediating the problems of climate change or rising energy needs?
- ❖ How do different common local food arrangements promote the socially responsible leg of sustainability? How do they not?
- ❖ If you were to guess, what forces do you think have led to the rise of local food arrangements?
- ❖ How does your self-selected article at the end contribute to or modify the arguments made in the first three listed?

Week 8: The Citizen Consumer

Where does sustainability intersect with consumption? This week we will consider the consumer as an agent of change in the food system by looking at the dominant mode of change promoted: the citizen consumer. Can a change in consumption patterns change our food system?

- Lockie, Stewart. 2009. "Responsibility and Agency within Alternative Food Networks: Assembling the 'Citizen Consumer'." *Agriculture and Human Values* 26(3): 193-201.
- Pollan, Michael. "Chapter 16: The Omnivore's Dilemma" Pp. 298-303 in *The Omnivore's Dilemma*.
- Hassanein, Neva. 2003. "Practicing food democracy: A pragmatic politics of transformation." *Journal of Rural Studies* 19(1): 77-86.
- Howard, Philip, & Patricia Allen. 2010. "Beyond Organic and Fair Trade? An Analysis of Ecolabel Preferences in the United States." *Rural Sociology* 75(2): 244-269.
- ❖ What is the citizen consumer? How does this model support organic consumption? Local sourcing? Fair trade? Conversely, how do each of these things promote (or not) a citizen consumer model? In what ways is the citizen consumer supported by (and supporting of) a neoliberal approach to food? In what ways is it not?
- ❖ What are the advantages and disadvantages of a certified labeling system for things like "local" and "humane"? Does certification make them likely to be conventionalized? How might we prevent this from happening?
- ❖ Pollan suggests two main reasons for what he calls "America's National Eating Disorder": one cultural (we do not have a stable or clearly defined national cuisine) and one structural (basing our food supply on a capitalist market). Considering everything we've covered this quarter, what do you make of these reasons? How is Pollan right and how is he wrong?
- ❖ Pollan's book subtitle is "A Natural History of Four Meals." Is there anything natural about the meals you have read about in his book?
- ❖ Howard and Allen conclude that
...consumers are interested in changing the direction of the food system to one that places a greater emphasis on political and ethical values, particularly local production and the humane treatment of animals. Producers committed to ecological sustainability and/or social justice can utilize this information to adjust their production or marketing practices to be congruent with consumer preferences.... More substantive changes could be catalyzed through the greater engagement of both producers and consumers in food-system planning and social movements.... (p. 265)
How does this align with the citizen consumer model Lockie describes? How might Lockie critique or respond to the approach Howard and Allen discuss?

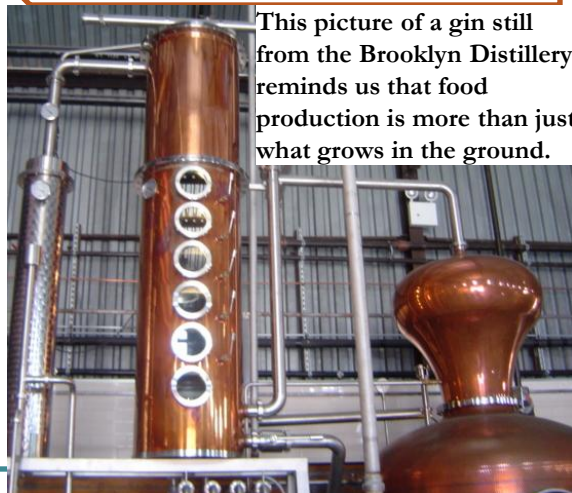
I don't count attendance as part of your normal grade, though I do track it and would love for you to come to every class. That said, I recognize that you are fully-functional adults capable of deciding what's best for you in a given moment; sometimes life just throws us curveballs: your car breaks down, you get hung over, your printer or computer is on the fritz, you'll oversleep, a relative will die (I hope not!), or something just makes life difficult or simply prevents you from coming to class. If this happens, talk to me; I want to help if I can.

Attendance

Note, though, that I don't take kindly to "did we do anything important?" emails. Yes. If you miss one day (even if it was for some legitimate emergency) the responsible thing to do is a: let me know and b: check with another student from the class to find out what was covered. After you have done this I will gladly answer questions you have, but I will not discuss missed material with you before you have first made an effort to get notes from someone else.

Continued enrollment in this course implies acceptance of the following **five agreements**:

1. In class, be positive, willing, and prepared.
2. Come to class on time.
3. Don't give leaving cues (packing up early, snapping binders shut, etc.).
4. Be respectful.
5. Be authentic (honest, real, true, etc.).



This picture of a gin still from the Brooklyn Distillery reminds us that food production is more than just what grows in the ground.

Plagiarism and Cheating

Don't do it. Acts of academic dishonesty (plagiarism, cheating, etc.) will be reported to the Honor Council and will get you a zero on the assignment. If you are uncertain what constitutes academic dishonesty, please read the Academic Honor Code, which is available at: <http://www.latech.edu/documents/honor-code.pdf>. When in doubt, ask first! Phrases or even ideas that are not your own should be cited. For example:

- *Attribute an argument or idea as follows:* Many people found their sociology course to be the best one they'd taken all year (Author's-Last-Name Year-of-Publication).
- *Attribute a quote as follows:* "Many people found their sociology course to be the best one they'd taken all year" (Author's-Last-Name Year-of-Publication: Page #). [you still don't need the comma, though!]

Extra Resources

We live in an uncertain world. The university's Emergency Notification System does just what its name suggests. You would be wise to enroll or update your contact information in this system to receive important text and voice alerts in the event of a campus emergency. You can do so at <http://www.latech.edu/administration/ends.shtml>.

The Counseling Center (310 Keeny Hall) provides a variety of services for students with personal, educational, and career concerns; these services are free and are provided by licensed professional counselors. For more information visit <http://www.latech.edu/students/counseling/>.

Tutoring and Writing Assistance

The BARC (Bulldog Achievement Resource Center) can be found on the main floor of Wyly Tower (room 202). While they do not offer regular tutoring in sociology, they do offer help with writing skills and they may also be a useful resource for your other classes. You can learn more about the services they offer at <http://www.latech.edu/barc/>.

Special Accommodations

If you are in need of special accommodation (due to a learning or physical disability, special life circumstances, or something else altogether), please let me know by the second week of classes. You may bring me documentation later. More information is available at the Office of Disability Services (<http://www.latech.edu/ods/index.shtml>).

Appendix: Commodity Analysis *Adapted from a project by Neva Hassenein*

One way to understand the relationship among actors and activities involved in creating goods and services – in this case, food – is to describe them as links in a commodity chain. Sociologists and economists have taken various approaches to this kind of analysis. For instance, one might focus on labor, agroecology, and the production processes involved (e.g., how something is produced, by whom, under what conditions, and what are the consequences). Others might focus on how a chain – or network of relationships – might link a particular pattern of production with a particular type of consumption (e.g., how particular demands/values of consumers might encourage or stimulate particular kinds of production). Still others might focus on the relationships among the actors involved (e.g., who has power and resources over whom; whether the terms of trade are such that values, like a fair price or food quality, are incorporated). Regardless of the lens used, commodity chain analysis can serve to unearth interesting social, ecological, and/or economic relationships that are embodied in the production, processing, distribution, and consumption of a product.

In this assignment, you will have the opportunity to conduct a commodity chain analysis based on one or two dimensions that are of interest to you. **First, select a food product that is available in two forms. The two forms will differ from each other on at least one important dimension** (e.g., produced nearby/produced far away; produced by a large corporation/by a small corporation or cooperative; feedlot/confinement vs. grass-finished meat; organic vs. conventionally produced). The products you select should be two versions of the same foodstuff (e.g., organic and conventional apples, Kellogg's Rice Krispies and the generic version, conventional and local eggs, feedlot and grass-finished beef) or they may be different foodstuffs that would be used or consumed in similar fashion (e.g., cane sugar, sugar from beets, and/or maple syrup). In other words, choose two foodstuffs that are more or less

substitutable for each other, but that differ in some significant way or ways. The differences will allow for comparisons, which often yield interesting insights.

Second, you will then trace the various social and physical transformations that the products have gone through on their way to your mouth. You will explore how the two versions differ and come to your own conclusions about these two versions of the product. The point is for you to learn as much as you can about how two foodstuffs are produced and what the implications (costs and benefits, if you will) of their production and consumption may be. Find out as much as you can about what happens to each product as it moves from its point of production to your mouth. Explore the differences in how the products are grown, processed, shipped, handled, advertised, and/or sold. Assess whether these differences make one of them more appealing to you. This in turn might influence your future purchasing decisions.

In order to discover and elaborate these differences, begin with the products. Purchase them at a retail outlet and trace their path back to the Earth. Once you have started on your journey, there is no set path you must take. There will be opportunities to take many side paths, especially if your products are composed of multiple ingredients. The simplest and most linear paths will be those for such products as local fresh fruits and vegetables. Often, the path will run from a grower, to a distributor or processor, to a wholesaler, to a retailer. The most complex and dendritic paths will be those for multiple ingredient products (e.g., ketchup, Rice Krispies). You need not follow all of the branches. For instance, if you did ketchup, you may concentrate on a few key ingredients, say tomatoes and sugar, and not worry about the spices. Other side paths may be involved when tracing waste flows, or sources of packaging. At times this research may prove challenging – there will be occasional dead-ends. Imagine you are an investigative journalist like Michael Pollen and keep at it!

Your final report should be double spaced, clearly written, free of errors, and as long as it needs to be to describe the commodity chain and analyze its implications. Better papers are ones that give adequate (and possibly equal) attention to both description and analysis. That is, you must tell me not only what is *going on*, but also what it *means*. To help get you there, you should include the following elements:

- **Introduction:** a clear description of the products you are comparing, an explanation of why you chose to compare them.
- **Path Analysis:** a description of the path the product took from its origins to your mouth, noting all major stops and production steps along the way, including explanations of from where or whom you obtained the information. This might include a map and/or flow chart.
- **Comparison:** describe the ways in which the two products differ. While you may mention several differences, it will be best to focus on one or two major ones of interest to you.
- **Conclusion:** do you prefer one product or the other, and for what reasons?
- **References and Data Sources:** a listing of the materials you used and the people you talked with in doing your commodity analysis. You are welcome and encouraged to draw on course material as well as outside sources.

You should select your food items by March 28; feel free to consult with me about ideas in advance. We will also check in with each other periodically to see how things are progressing.

Possible Information Sources:

- 800 numbers on product packages
- Addresses and/or source codes on product labels
- Interviews with key informants on the phone or in person
- Companies
- Trade Journals
- Books/Articles
- Newspaper Articles
- Internet Sites
- Advertisements

In the past, students have found that in most cases a phone call gets them further than an email message.

Be creative in how you go about this; there is no one right way to find the information you need – you'll likely need to think outside the box and be willing to talk to lots of people.

Information You May Want to Consider:

- Geographic source of the produce
 - Place of origin
 - Distance from your point of purchase
 - Shipping method (plane, train, ship, animal, human)
 - Shipping cost (\$, energy)
- Production practices
 - Energy use
 - Chemical inputs (pesticides, fertilizers)
 - Land use (irrigation, forest destruction)
 - Labor conditions (pay, hours, etc.)
 - Waste flows
 - Breeds of animals or plant varieties
- Processing
 - Energy use
 - Flavoring additives
 - Preservation techniques
 - Waste flows
- Organizational status of the companies involved
 - Trans-national corporations
 - Cooperatives
 - Independent producers/small businesses
- Information availability
 - Accessibility of informants
 - Advertising
 - Package labeling
 - Potential visibility of production
 - Public availability of information
- Product characteristics
 - Taste
 - Freshness
 - Quality
 - Price
 - Convenience
 - Shelf life
 - Nutritional value

Beer fermentation barrels from the Brooklyn Brewery. Depending on your product's origin, you could gain valuable data by visiting a



production or processing site. What might you learn by seeing the place first-hand and talking to the owner or operator? If it's possible, give it a go! Think of it as an extra field trip you get to take.