

SOCIOLOGY 341
Sociology of Agriculture: The Global Food System
ST. FRANCIS XAVIER UNIVERSITY, Fall 2018
Dr. Riley Chisholm

Office: 110C Annex Building (Until further notice)

E-mail: rchishol@stfx.ca

Office Hours:

Mondays 9-11

Tuesdays 12-2

Thursdays 2:30-4:00

Class Times: Tuesday 9:45-11 am and Thursday at 8:15-9:30 am

Classroom: Schwartz 290



Food touches everything. Food is the foundation of every economy. It is a central pawn in political strategies of states and households. Food marks social differences, boundaries, bonds, and contradictions. Eating is an endlessly evolving enactment of gender, family, and community relationships. ...Food is life, and life can be studied and understood through food. Counihan and Van Esterik, 1997.

This course begins with an interdisciplinary survey of the scientific, philosophical, political, social and cultural aspects of global agriculture and food production. Topics examined include the Green Revolution, the relationship between agricultural and social sustainability, local food versus export economies, food security, food sovereignty and justice, as well as biotechnology, soil science and climate farming. At least one farm visit is

also included.

Required Reading:

Course Kit (Available in the bookstore – look for the course number and my name).

University and Classroom Policies

Plagiarism: Familiarize yourself with the university plagiarism policies and punishments. You are responsible for understanding them and abiding by them. The StFX library has links, tutorials, and definitions at this site: <http://sites.stfx.ca/library/plagiarism>. The StFX calendar outlines the procedures concerning and penalties for committing plagiarism.

StFX Equity Policy: Everyone learns more effectively in a respectful, safe and equitable learning environment, free from discrimination and harassment. I invite you to work with me to create a classroom space—both face-to-face and online—that fosters and promotes values of human dignity, equity, non-discrimination and respect for diversity. These values and practices are in accord with the StFX Discrimination and Harassment Policy which can be found at <http://www.mystfx.ca/campus/stu-serv/equity/>. Please feel free to talk to me about your questions or concerns about equity in our classroom or in the StFX community in general. If I cannot answer your questions or help you address your concerns, I encourage you to talk to the Chair/Coordinator of the Department/Program or the Human Rights and Equity Advisor.

Electronics: Although electronic technologies have the potential to enhance learning, recent studies suggest that the use of personal computers and other electronic devices can be detrimental to students' learning. See:

<https://bokcenter.harvard.edu/technology-and-student-distraction>

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/technology/laptop-use-lowers-student-grades-experiment-shows-1.1401860>

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2014/04/28/why-students-using-laptops-learn-less-in-class-even-when-they-really-are-taking-notes/>.

For this reason, phones and computers should be turned off and away while class is being held. Some students genuinely require supportive technologies, for instance, a computer to take notes (where handwriting notes is not an option)—in such instances, students should let me know.

Course grades and lectures policy: I do not use PowerPoint in class and do not post/provide my lectures to students. Students who miss classes are responsible to get missed lecture notes from another student in the class. Also, I do not discuss or provide grades over email.

Grading:

- A. Food Storyboard 30% Due: Thursday October 18th
- B. Major Paper 30% Due: Thursday November 15th
- C. Weekly Reflections 40% Due: Fridays

Long description of assignment requirements:

Food Story Board (30%) Due Thursday October 18th

Students will select a single food item such as potatoes, corn chips, or salt. Once you determine your focus, begin to do some research to respond to some, or all of the following questions:

- A. What is the **social history** of the item—that is, how did it used to be made, used, transported, who did all this and where? Then what happened....
- B. How is it currently processed, where and by whom? Is the sector dominated by certain corporations? Is there anything known about the farmworkers that grow and harvest this item, and the conditions of their **work**?
- C. Are there any **health** implications associated with the item? For instance, is it grown using glyphosate? Does it deplete water tables in regions where it is produced?
- D. What are the **environmental** implications of the product? Does it require vast amounts of water, land, chemical fertilisers, herbicides, fuel for transportation and refrigeration? From what countries is this item shipped? Can we not make it here? Why or why not? Are there any local alternatives? What are the food miles associated with the item?
- E. Highlight any current or past popular mobilisations around the food. Have there been **political** movements to note?

IMPORTANT: Please attach a list of the sources you used (in APA formatting) on the back of your storyboard so that any claims you make can be verified by me. Please be careful to select sources that are reliable. (Ask me if you are unclear about what this means).

Lastly, using the basic criteria above (A-E), give the item a rating out of /5 accompanied by an argument about whether or not we should be eating this particular food item into the future. A score of 5 means we should eat more of this item, whereas a score of 0 means that you could not find any redeeming qualities of the food item based on the criteria. Once you have gathered your information, organize it on your storyboard in a creative way, so that we can come to know the social, economic, political and environmental story about your food item in a way that is well-organised, compelling and comprehensive.

B. Major Paper (30%) Due: Thursday November 15th

Length: 10 pages, double-spaced, 12 point font

This assignment requires that you write a paper that expands upon one of the following topics:

- 1. The relationship between global agricultural and gender (in)equality
- 2. How industrial agriculture is a threat to the commons (Think :Nestle)
- 3. The relationship between epidemics (obesity, or cancer for example) and industrial agriculture

4. Water Wars: How water resources are at risk. (Think: Indigenous resistance to the Dakota Access Pipeline, or more locally, the AltGas storage caverns).
5. The political significance of country foods
6. GMO crops vs. heritage crops
7. Biotechnology as the 'way out' of the food crisis (Think: 'Clean meat' at: <https://www.peta.org/living/food/memphis-meats-debuts-lab-grown-chicken-clean-meat/>).
8. Gender and farming
9. Race, exploitation and global agriculture
10. Suicide and agriculture
11. What's the matter with the Canadian government's approach to agriculture? (Think: <http://www.agr.gc.ca/eng/news/agriculture-150/?id=1478796320950>)
12. Sustainable approaches to food: Vegan, vegetarian diets...are they 'healthy'?

Please ensure you take a critical approach and employ at least 4 high quality resources, preferably from academic texts. Grammar, spelling and especially, force of argument will be evaluated.

C. Weekly Reflections (40%) Due on Fridays

Students are required to submit 8, one-page, single spaced reflections which consider what was learned during the week. Using all of the resources examined during the week –the readings assigned, lecture material, guest speaker, audio/video etc..., respond to the following:

1. At the start of each reflection, include your name and the title of the week you are responding to: For instance, if you are reflecting on Week 2, write : **Week 2: Food Regimes**, as it is written on the syllabus, below.
2. Using no more than 1-2 sentences, describe the main message for the entire week. Referring to the course resources for the week, spend approximately one paragraph indicating how the resources support or reinforce that main message.
3. Do you feel you understand the issue clearly? If so, comment on whether this issue is new to you, or if some aspect of it is new? If you do not fully understand the issue, what aspect is unclear?
4. Include any further questions, frustrations, thoughts or comments you have about the topic.

As in every case in this course, I ask that you enjoy this activity. Also note: Spelling, grammar, word choice and tone matter in the assessment of your submission.

Schedule of Weekly Readings, Tests and Assignments

Week 1: Introduction: Why a sociology of agriculture? (Sep. 4th and 6th)

- No readings this week

Week 2: Food regimes (Sep. 11th and 13th)

- Henry Bernstein. 2015. “Food Regimes and Food Regime Analysis: A Selective Survey”, Land grabbing, conflict and agrarian-environmental transformations: perspectives from East and Southeast Asia Conference 5-6 June, Chiang Mai University. Available at: https://www.iss.nl/sites/corporate/files/CMCP_1-_Bernstein.pdf
- McMichael, P. 2009. “A food regime analysis of the ‘world food crisis’”, *Agriculture and Human Values*, 26 (4): 281-295. Available at: <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/a00a/c3df508123145b5e16f9ef9d8fc6341b790e.pdf>

Week 3: The Green Revolution (Sep. 18th and 20th)

- Shiva, V. 2016. “Science and Politics in the Green Revolution”, In *The Violence of the Green Revolution: Third World Agriculture, Ecology and Politics*. Available at: http://www.trabal.org/texts/pdf/shiva_gr_excerpts.pdf
- Shiva, V. 1991. “The Green Revolution in the Punjab”, *The Ecologist*, Vol. 21, No. 2, March-April 1991 Available at: <http://livingheritage.org/green-revolution.htm>.
- Perkins, J.H., (1990). The Rockefeller Foundation and the Green Revolution, 1941- 1956. *Agriculture and Human Values*, 7(3-4):6-18.

Week 4: Food Crises (Sept. 25th and 27th)

- Holt-Giménez. 2011. “Food security, food justice or food sovereignty?: Crises, food movements and regime change”. In Aikon and J. Agyeman (Eds.). *Cultivating Sustainability*. Cambridge, MA. MIT Press. Pp.309-311.
- Film: Seeds of Hunger (53 minutes)
<http://www.cultureunplugged.com/documentary/watch-online/play/12575/Seeds-of-Hunger>
- http://www.yesmagazine.org/pdf/49/JusttheFacts_Poster8.5x11.pdf

Week 5: Distinctions between industrial and sustainable agriculture (Oct 2st and 4th)

- Weis, Tony. 2010. “The Accelerating Biophysical Contradictions of Industrial Capitalist Agriculture” , *Journal of Agrarian Change*, Vol. 10 No. 3, pp. 315–341. Available at: <http://geography.uwo.ca/faculty/weis/papers/Weis%202010%20-%20The%20Accelerating%20Biophysical%20Contradictions%20of%20Industrial%20Capitalist%20Agriculture.pdf>

- Hoorigan et al. (2002) “How Sustainable Agriculture Can Address the Environmental and Human Health Harms of Industrial Agriculture”, *Environmental Health Perspectives*, 110 (5). Available at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1240832/pdf/ehp0110-000445.pdf>
- Ikerd, John. 2011. “Healthy soils, healthy people: the legacy of William Albrecht”. Available at: <http://web.missouri.edu/ikerdj/papers/Albrecht%20Lecture%20-%20Healthy%20Soils%20Healthy%20People.htm>

Week 6: Water Wars

(Oct 9th and 11th)

- Eplett, L. 2015. “Political Climates: Drought and Conflict in Syria”. Available at: <http://blogs.scientificamerican.com/food-matters/political-climates-drought-and-conflict-in-syria/>
- Film: FLOW (1:20 mins): <https://youtu.be/TvtvVQPxmzM>

Week 7: The Grocery Industrial Complex

(Oct 16th and 18th)

- OPIRG, ‘The Supermarket Tour’ Available at: http://www.fairtradebarrie.ca/pdf/wpimg_supermarket_tour.pdf

Week 8: Having limits, a philosophy of life.

(Oct 23rd and 25th)

- Martin, D. 2012. Nutrition transition and the public-health crisis: Aboriginal perspectives on food and eating. In M. Koc, J. Sumner and A. Winson (Eds.). In *Critical Perspectives in Food Studies*. Toronto: Oxford. Pp. 208-222.
- Film: Seeking Netuklimik Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jrk3ZI_2Dd0 (22 mins)
- Prosper, K. , McMillan, L. J. , Davis, A. A. , Moffitt, M. (2011). Returning to Netukulimk: Mi’kmaq cultural and spiritual connections with resource stewardship and self-governance. *The International Indigenous Policy Journal*, 2(4) . Available at: <https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1037&context=iipj>

Week 9: ‘Together we can cool the planet’: Peasant farmers and the climate

(Oct 30th and Nov. 1st)

- No readings this week! Take a break.
- Farm Visit TBA

Week 10: Soil, and why it’s sociological.

(Nov 6th and 8th)

- “Shiva, V. 2016. “Chemical Fertilizers and Soil Fertility””, In *The Violence of the Green Revolution: Third World Agriculture, Ecology and Politics*. Available at: http://www.trabal.org/texts/pdf/shiva_gr_excerpts.pdf

- McNeill, et al. 2004. “Breaking the Sod: Humankind, History, and Soil *Science* 304, 1627. Available at: <http://documents.scribd.com.s3.amazonaws.com/docs/6lc9ev718g131pdh.pdf?t=1313772098>
- Film: *Dirt*

Week 11: Biotechnology and food aid (Nov 13th and 15th)

- Miguel A. Altieri & Peter Rosset. 1999. Ten reasons why biotechnology will not ensure food security, protect the environment and reduce poverty in the developing world. *AgBioForum*, 2(3) pp. 155-162. Available at: <http://documents.scribd.com.s3.amazonaws.com/docs/1pz3390uo012wu7c.pdf?t=1313522139>
- Oxfam. 2001. *Food aid or hidden dumping? Separating wheat from chaff*. Available online at: http://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/bp71_food_aid.pdf pp. 2-29
- Clapp, Jennifer. 2004. “The political economy of food aid in an era of agricultural biotechnology”. *Global Governance*. Available at: <http://www.trentu.ca/org/tipec/4clapp6.pdf>

Major Paper Due Thursday, November 15th

Week 12: Save our seed! (Nov 20nd and 22th)

- NFU Fact Sheet available at: <http://www.nfu.ca/issues/save-our-seed>
- Shiva, V. 2016. “Miracle seeds” and the destruction of genetic diversity”, In *The Violence of the Green Revolution: Third World Agriculture, Ecology and Politics*. Available at: http://www.trabal.org/texts/pdf/shiva_gr_excerpts.pdf
- Film: Seeds of Freedom (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4fRGt98oN6w> (30 minutes)

Week 13: Toward a moral revolution

(Nov. 27th and 29th)

- Film: *Green Rights: Your right to a healthy world*.
- Bellamy Foster, J. 1995. “The Treadmill of Production”. Keynote address: *Watersheds '94 Conference, U.S. EPA*. Monthly Review.

