

Socioenvironmental Justice: Food, Power, and Place in the Americas

Course level: Upper-level undergraduate course

Course description: Food and agriculture are intimate parts of our daily lives, connecting our natural environment to the social world we inhabit. Food production has become increasingly globalized as improvements in transportation, cold storage, and production techniques have dramatically shifted production and consumption patterns. Today local grocery stores serve as gateways to picture-perfect fruits and vegetables in mid-winter -- Chilean grapes, Peruvian asparagus, and Mexican tomatoes. They highlight the linkages between production in the global south and consumption in the northern hemisphere, raising questions about access, sustainability, and power along the supply chain. This course provides concepts and frameworks for thinking about agri-food systems, including the commodification, economic concentration, and global reach of our food. We will explore what those trends mean for firms, farmers, agricultural workers, consumers, and communities. To accomplish this, we will use the global commodity chain to map and analyze complex global processes and their socioeconomic, political, ethical, and environmental consequences. Through this heuristic we will uncover the linkages between global production and consumption, as well as labor rights, environmental justice, and regulatory frameworks. Commodity chains help to illuminate connections among geographically distant locales, bridging the local/global divide that troubles much of the research and activism surrounding globalization.

Select Readings: We will examine contemporary struggles over agri-food commodities such as: genetically modified seeds, soy, tortillas, mezcal, tomatoes, and coffee, ending with a consideration of the meanings of “fairness” in global commodity chains. Student working groups will present reports on their independent research on an agri-food commodity chain and its implications for local communities, development, the environment, and sustainability.

The Global Economy and Modern Agriculture:

Busch, Lawrence. 2010. “Can Fairy Tales Come True? The Surprising Story of Neoliberalism and World Agriculture.” *Sociologia Ruralis* 50 (4).

Estabrook, Barry. 2011. *Tomatoland: How Modern Industrial Agriculture Destroyed Our Most Alluring Fruit*. Andrews McMeel Publishing.

Heffernan, William. 1999. “Consolidation in the Food and Agricultural System.” Report to the National Farmers Union.

Agriculture in the Era of Sustainability

Alkon, Alison Hope and Julian Agyeman (Eds). 2011. *Cultivating Food Justice: Race, Class, and Sustainability*. MIT Press.

Altieri, Miguel A., and Víctor Manuel Toledo. 2011. “The Agroecological Revolution in Latin America: Rescuing Nature, Ensuring Food Sovereignty and Empowering Peasants.” *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 38:3, 587-612.

Holt-Gimenez, Eric and Annie Shattuck. 2011. "Food Crises, Food Regimes, and Food Movements: rumblings of reform or tides of transformation?" *Journal of Peasant Studies* 38 (1).

Kloppenborg, Jack, John Hendrickson and G. W. Stevenson. 1996. "Coming Into the Foodshed." *Agriculture and Human Values* 13 (3) (Summer): 33-42.

The Politics of Production and Place

Bowen, Sarah. 2015. *Divided Spirits: Tequila, Mezcal, and the Politics of Production*. University of California Press.

Jaffee, Dan. 2007. *Brewing Justice: Fair Trade Coffee, Sustainability and Survival*. University of California Press.

Corporate Power, Environmental Justice, and Resistance

Lapegna, Pablo. 2016. *Soy beans and Power: Genetically Modified Crops, Environmental Politics, and Social Movements in Argentina*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Leguizamón, Amalia. 2016. "Environmental Injustice in Argentina: Struggles Against Genetically Modified Soy." *Journal of Agrarian Change* 16 (4): 684-692.

Mascarenhas, Michael and Lawrence Busch. 2006. "Seeds of Change: Intellectual Property Rights, Genetically Modified Soybeans, and Seed-Saving in the United States." *Sociologia Ruralis* Vol 46 (2): 122-138.

Schurman, Rachel and William A. Munro. 2010. *Fighting for the Future of Food: Activists versus Agribusiness in the Struggle over Biotechnology*. University of Minnesota Press.

Health and Labor Struggles in Global Food Production

Bank Muñoz, Carolina. 2008. *Transnational Tortillas: Race, Gender and Shop Floor Politics in Mexico and the United States*. Cornell University Press.

Galt, Ryan E. 2014. *Food Systems in an Unequal World: Pesticides, Vegetables, and Agrarian Capitalism in Costa Rica*. Society, Environment, and Place Series. Tucson: University of Arizona Press.

Gereffi, Gary, Joonkoo Lee and Michelle Christian. 2009. "U.S.-Based Food and Agricultural Value Chains and Their Relevance to Healthy Diets." *Journal of Hunger and Environmental Nutrition* 4 (3): 357-374.