As globalization obscures locality of ecosystems and communities with brands and logos, the best way to recognize our true nature and needs is food. Every bit of our nutrition was once alive and we incorporate the fractured carcasses of plants and animals into our own bodies. What species do we consume, where, how and by whom were they reared and harvested, what was the ecological footprint of the food?


A lawn is nature under totalitarian rule.


This course uses food and farming to study the political, economic, and ethical issues that arise in the relations between business and society. The course will begin by looking at how our modern global food system has come to be with the globalization of markets in agricultural goods starting with the Columbian Exchange up to our contemporary era. We will use the concept of ‘food regimes’ to study this history of the production, consumption and distribution of food. Next, we will explore the extent of corporate concentration backwards and forwards along the food commodity chain as well as how the family farm has adapted to the rise of capital-intensive farming. Our focus throughout is on the complex relationships between corporate capitalism and agriculture and the possible alternatives to it. Along the way, we will critically examine a variety of issues arising from the current industrial-business model of modern agriculture: corporate control of seeds and land; poverty, famines and obesity; worker and consumer health and the chemicalization of agriculture. We will conclude by considering the role of food sovereignty movements in promoting more sustainable, just and equitable alternatives.

Key words: Food regimes, commodification of food, food systems, land grabs and neocolonialism, sustainability, food policy, food security, globalization, inequality, capitalism, famines, health and nutrition, food crises, food sovereignty, food justice, Fair Trade, La Via Campesina, and agroecology.
**Aims and Structure of the Course:**

Students will examine how industrial agriculture emerged in the modern era, starting from the Columbian Exchange (1493) through to ‘revolutions’ in English agriculture in the 18th and 19th centuries and to the Green Revolution after WWII. We will explore the world of business as it shapes our food system in the following way:

I. **Introduction to the Political Economy of Food:** We trace the origins and growth of the modern global food system from the global market in agricultural products since 1493 (Columbian Exchange) to the plantation economies (sugar, tobacco and cotton) and the development of capitalist agriculture since the 19th C.

II. **The Production of Food:** We will explore how different food regimes relate to the land, class relations and technological change specifically through the mechanization and chemicalization of agriculture.

III. **The Distribution and Consumption of Food:** We examine how concentrations of corporate power have affected the storage, transportation and processing of food, as well as how these are related to issues of hunger and obesity.

IV. **Ethics and Alternatives:** We will conclude the course with an exploration of some of the most pressing issues facing Canada and the world: sustainability, food sovereignty and agro-ecological alternatives to the dominant industrial food system.

**Learning Outcomes**

Upon completion of this course, students should have acquired the following capacities:

- **Knowledge:** students will be able to identify and describe selected developments in the modern era of food and farming. They will collect, review and interpret primary and secondary research in order to compare and evaluate competing views on a pressing problem associated with the production, distribution and consumption of food.

- **Comprehension:** students will a to grasp theoretical foundations of interdisciplinary approaches to contemporary food studies, particularly by comparing approaches to studying and interpreting human and corporate behaviour.

- **Application:** students will demonstrate an understanding of the causes of a range of contemporary problems related to food and farming and apply this knowledge to real-world situations.

- **Analytical Skills:** students will develop arguments and strategies regarding key issues in business and society, giving consideration to the interests and values of different stakeholder groups (farmers, migrant workers, citizen-consumers, communities, business and government).

**Evaluation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment 1</th>
<th>Forum Discussion</th>
<th>20%</th>
<th>Weekly (5 weeks)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assignment 2</td>
<td>Film Review and Presentation</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>TBD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assignment 3</td>
<td>Food Commodity History</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>May 26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assignment 4</td>
<td>Food History Timeline (Group)</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>June 9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Course Policies

ATTENDANCE

If you wish to be excused for missing a seminar, you must:

1) Inform me on the same day as the seminar for which you wish to be excused.
2) Provide written documentation (e.g. an attending physician’s note) pertaining to your absence within 1 week of the missed class.

Arriving late or leaving early will be judged as a partial absence.

LATE PENALTIES

The standard late penalty is 2% per day.

COURSE WITHDRAWAL DATES

The last day to drop the course without receiving a grade is June 8. The withdrawal period is June 9-June 22. Other important dates can be found here.

EMAIL COMMUNICATION

I will respond to email inquiries as soon as possible, and you can expect a response within 24-48 hours. Please do not repeat your request before this period has elapsed.

WRITE POLICY

If you submit an assignment, you do not have the option of re-writing it. There are no additional make-up assignments for lost grades.

ACADEMIC HONESTY

Students should be familiar with the Senate Policy on Academic Honesty. There are various forms of breaches of the policy, including using material from the Internet, books, articles or other sources without proper documentation or acknowledgement. Dishonesty in publication involves falsifying or fabricating data or sources. Encouraging others to violate the policy by, for example, by posting your notes or written assignments online is also a form of academic misconduct. These are ALL very serious offenses at the university. If you are caught, which is very likely, the penalty is very severe.

Academic misconduct will be investigated in an exploratory meeting administered by the Department’s Academic Honesty Committee. The MINIMUM penalty for academic dishonesty on any assignment for this course is ZERO on the relevant assignment. No opportunity for rewriting work will be given.
Recommended Readings and Resources


The following is a list of land and food-based organizations in the social economy:

**Food Secure Canada**: “Food Secure Canada is a pan-Canadian alliance of organizations and individuals working together to advance food security and food sovereignty through three interlocking goals: zero hunger, healthy and safe food, and sustainable food systems.”

**La Via Campesina**: “La Via Campesina is an international movement bringing together millions of peasants, small and medium size farmers, landless people, rural women and youth, indigenous people, migrants and agricultural workers from around the world.”

**La Via Campesina TV**: “It brings together audio-visual material and cultural creations from the farmers’ organisations themselves, whether they are members of Via Campesina or not, as well as material produced by friends, allies or sometimes mainstream media.”

**National Farmers’ Union**: “The National Farmers Union is a direct-membership organization made up of Canadian farm families who share common goals... The National Farmers Union is unique among farm organizations in working for people’s interests against corporate control of our food system.”

**Canadian Association of Food Studies**: “The Canadian Association for Food Studies (CAFS) promotes critical, interdisciplinary scholarship in the broad area of food systems: food policy, production, distribution and consumption.”

**FoodShare**: “Everything we do at FoodShare Toronto is aimed at realizing a resilient, just and sustainable food system to ensure Good Healthy Food for All!”

**Indigenous Food Systems Network**: “The Indigenous Food Systems Network Website was developed by the WGIFS [Working Group on Indigenous Food Sovereignty] and is designed to allow individuals and groups involved with Indigenous food related action, research, and policy reform to network and share relevant resources and information.”

A note on the schedule of readings: Required readings are followed by reading questions that provide some starting points for engaging with the readings. These are not the only, or necessarily best, questions. The most powerful skill you can develop is the ability to articulate powerful questions. Recommended readings can be used for the essays, but this should be supplemented by your own research. Documentary presentations will be scheduled by the end of the first week of class.
## Schedule of Course Readings

### Section I: Introductions and the Political Economy of Food

#### Class 1: Introductions: Aims and Structure of the Course (May 12)

**Required**


*Reading Question:* How did these three elements of the ‘Columbian Exchange’—potatoes, guano and *P. infestans*—impact European development, according to Mann? What kinds of technological changes contributed to the ‘agricultural revolution’ according to Overton? What difference does it make in dating when it occurred?

**Recommended**


#### Class 2: Food Regimes: Capitalism and Its Relation to Agriculture (May 14)

**Required**


*Reading Question:* What are the three food regimes and how do they help us understand the changing relations between governments (states), agriculture and industry (capitalism)? How does Holt-Gimenez challenge the dominant view is that our food system emerges as a result of the development of technology and the spread of markets?

**Recommended**


**CLASS 3: FOOD AND CAPITAL’S COMMODITY-ECONOMIC LOGIC (MAY 19)**

**Required**


*Reading Questions: How did something so fundamental to human existence come become subject to the logic of capital? What are the ways in which the capitalist organization of food production is irrational?*

**Recommended**


**Section II: Producing Food: Land (and Water), Labour and Capital**

**CLASS 4: CAPITALISM AND THE SOIL (MAY 21)**

**Required**


*Reading Questions: How has the chemicalization of agriculture affected the health of humans and the soil? How does this relate to capital’s logic? How does the concept of ‘metabolic rift’ help us understand the relations between labour, technology and nature?*

**Recommended**


**Food on Film**


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**CLASS 5: GLOBAL LAND GRABS: OLD AND NEW ENCLOSURES (MAY 26)**

**Required**


*Reading Questions: What does ‘accumulation by agricultural dispossession’ mean? What were the ‘Numbered Treaties’ and how could this be viewed as part of the same process of ‘accumulation by dispossession’? How does the AEZ methodology and commodity perspective the World Bank advocates relate to modern land grabs?*

**Recommended**


**Food on Film**


OR

**Required**

Background on Canada’s Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (see COVID-19 update, too) and the Agreement For The Employment In Canada Of Commonwealth Caribbean Seasonal Agricultural Workers – 2014


UFCW (United Food and Commercial Workers). 2015. The Status of Migrant Farm Workers in Canada. [available here].

Reading Questions: What is the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program and how has it been justified in the name of food security? Why do agricultural workers receive less protection and fewer benefits than the rest of us?

**Recommended**


**Food on Film**


OR

Section III: Consuming Food: Social, Environmental and Health Impacts

**CLASS 7: FOOD PROCESSING, DISTRIBUTION AND RETAILING (JUNE 2)**

**Required**


 Reading Questions: How has the globalization of the food system reduced the space and time constraints on capital accumulation? How can we use a ‘life-cycle assessment’ to examine the social, economic and environmental impacts of various food products?

**Recommended**


**Food on Film**


**CLASS 8: FACTORY FARMS AND PUBLIC HEALTH (JUNE 4)**

**Required**


Reading Questions: How has COVID-19 exposed vulnerabilities in our global food system? How has the industrial production of livestock contributed to this? What can be done to address these problems? There have been COVID-19 outbreaks at Cargill’s High River plant in Alberta, Maple Lodge Farms plant in Brampton, and the Chambly plant in Quebec: what does this tell us about worker safety in our food system?
Recommended


**Class 9: Industrial Food and Health Policy (June 9)**

Required


*Reading Questions: In what sense is food safety a political issue? What does the StarLink affair tell us about the challenges with assuring food safety? How have corporations tried to influence, obstruct or undermine attempts at incorporating nutrition into state food policies?*

Recommended


**Food on Film**

Section 4: Food Ethics and Alternative Food Regimes

CLASS 10: POVERTY, HUNGER AND FAMINES (JUNE 11)

Required


Reading Questions: What are the mechanisms by which people acquire food? What are the real causes of famines? How do political and economic institutional arrangements determine who starves? How is food aid more than about feeding the hungry?

Recommended


Food on Film


CLASS 11: FOOD SOVEREIGNTY: CRISIS, RESISTANCE AND TRANSFORMATION (JUNE 16)

Required


Reading Questions: How do different food movements diagnose the problems associated with our current food system? Which food movements are most likely to succeed in the future?
Recommended


Food on Film

Pacar, Antonio, et al. [Dirs]. 2019. Globalize Hope. La Via Campesina TV. 1hr 13mins

CLASS 12: AGROECOLOGY, SUSTAINABILITY AND ALTERNATIVES (JUNE 18)


Reading Questions: Can we feed 9 or 10 billion people sustainably? What can we do about this in our everyday lives?

Recommended

Sumner, Jennifer. 2007. Sustainability and the Civil Commons. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.


Food on Film


Tasting Food: end of year potluck! What food carries meaning for you? Is this something you can make? We will have a potluck in our final class where each of us will ‘bring’ a dish and share the story of how it has meaning for you.