

POL S/ENVIR 385
POLITICAL ECOLOGY OF THE WORLD FOOD SYSTEM
PRELIMINARY SYLLABUS ~ SPRING 2019

Professor Karen Litfin

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Course website: <https://canvas.uw.edu/courses/1273268>

TAs: Kenya Amano (AA, AB) and Hanna Navarro (AC, AD)

Lectures: TuTh 11:30-12:50 in Kane 210

Office hours: W 2-4 pm or by appt.

What We Will Study

This course will address these questions and more: Where does our food come from? What are the social, political and environmental roots and consequences of current agricultural practices? Who wins and who loses? To what extent are non-state actors altering the world political system? How is climate change likely to impact the world food system? In particular, we will focus on the pivotal role of petroleum in the world food system, the global carbon and nitrogen cycles, the questions of meat and genetically modified food, and new food movements around the world. How does our planetary food web challenge our sense of personal identity and ethical responsibility? *Please refer to Canvas for our up-to-date syllabus.*

What You Will Learn

If you participate actively in this course—which means seriously grappling with lectures, videos and readings; engaging yourself dynamically in quiz sections; diving deeply into either a group action project, service learning or a research paper—you will learn to:

- Think systemically about the world food system;
- Evaluate food systems at multiple scales, from local to global, through several lenses deployed in the course materials and discovered during personal reflection and research;
- Critically analyze world food problems and responses to these problems in light of their social, political, economic and ecological ramifications;
- Reflect upon the interpenetration of human and ecological systems in the Anthropocene;
- Develop creative responses to specific world food problems, both on your own and in collaboration with others;
- Be articulate about complexities of world food politics, both in writing and in conversation;
- Gain a stronger sense of social and political agency in the world food system;
- Have a deeper sense of what it means to be a human being living at this moment in history.

What You Will Do

Participation: You will read 80-120 pages per week. Please *read materials beforehand* and bring your full presence to both quiz sections and lectures. This includes a presentation in quiz section at the end of quarter.

Takeaways: For weeks when no other assignment is due, you will write a short (300-word limit) essay on a prompt.

Hungry planet paper: A 4-page paper linking the photographic essay, *Hungry Planet*, to course material

Midquarter paper on your choice: a group action project, service learning or a research paper (details TBA)

Final paper: Depending on your choice, either a 5-7 page essay synthesizing what you learned from your action project or service learning with the course as a whole or a 7-9 page research paper

Course Grading

Participation	20%
Takeaways	35%
Hungry Planet	15%
Midquarter paper	5%
Final paper	25%

Required Texts (in order)

Michael Pollan, *In Defense of Food* (Penguin, 2008).

Michael Carolan, *The Real Cost of Cheap Food* (second edition) (Earthscan, 2018).

Online readings on Canvas

Optional purchase: Lester R. Brown, *Full Planet, Empty Plates: The New Geopolitics of Food Scarcity* (Norton: 2012). Paperback or free PDF from Earth Policy Institute: <http://www.earth-policy.org/books/fpep>

Recommended:

Deborah Barndt, *Tangled Routes: Women, Work and Globalization on the Tomato Trail* (Rowman & Littlefield).

Michael S Carolan, *No One Eats Alone: Food as a Social Enterprise*. (Island Press, 2017).

Jennifer Clapp, *Food* (Polity Press, 2012).

E. Melanie DuPuis, *Nature's Perfect Food: How Milk Became America's Drink* (New York University Press).

David Goodman, E. Melanie DuPuis, Michael K. Goodman, *Alternative Food Networks: Knowledge, practice and politics* (Routledge, 2012).

Brian Halweil, *Eat Here: Reclaiming Homegrown Pleasures in the Global Supermarket* (Norton, 2004).

Dan Koeppel, *Banana: The Fate of the Fruit that Changed the World* (Hudson Street Press, 2008).

Lebel et al., *Places, Chains, and Plates: Governing Transitions in the Shrimp Aquaculture Production-Consumption System*" *Globalizations* (June 2008): 211-226.

Sidney Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (Viking, 1985).

Nabhan, Gary Paul. *Where Our Food Comes from: Retracing Nikolay Vavilov's Quest to End Famine*. (Island Press, 2009).

Danielle Nierenberg, *Nourished Planet : Sustainability in the Global Food System*. (Island Press, 2018).

Raj Patel, *Stuffed and Starved: The Hidden Battle for the World's Food System* ((Melville House, 2009).

Mark Pendergast, *Uncommon Grounds: The History of Coffee and How It Changed Our World* (Basic Books, 2005).

Lowell Satre, *Chocolate on Trial: Slavery, Politics and the Ethics of Business* (Ohio University Press, 2005).

Videos

The recent upsurge of concern about the world food system has sparked the release of a plethora of excellent movies, many of which explore course themes more graphically and thoroughly than I could hope to accomplish in lecture, we will view some of them in class. While I want you to enjoy these movies and video clips, I want to emphasize that their primary purpose is educational—not entertainment! While you will not be examined on minute details, the videos are as much a part of the course as the readings and lectures. Please take notes as you will be examined on core concepts.

We will be viewing parts of the following videos in class. Most of these will also be on 2-hour reserve at the Media Center:

DVD BFI 016/Silent Killer	DVD BFI 051/King Corn
DVD MAGN 019/Food, Inc.	DVD TAC 2124 pt.1/Cuba
DVD LILY 002/Symphony of the Soil	DVD TAC 3341/Nourish
DVD BFI 022/Buyer Be Fair	DVD BFI 139 pt. 3 & 4/Future Food

Three options: Service Learning, Group Action Projects, and Research Papers

Service-learning provides a unique experience to connect coursework with engagement in and with the local community. Service-learning opportunities address concerns that are identified and articulated by community partner organizations. Service-learning combines community-based service with structured preparation and reflection opportunities.

Service-learning opportunities generally require a minimum commitment of three hours each week. Students are expected to commit from the second week of the quarter through the last week of classes. Service-learning is seen as an essential “text” in your class—you are expected to regularly engage with, reflect on, and integrate the service-learning into your classroom experience through structured classroom reflection and assignments. Building authentic relationships and consistent, weekly engagement with your community partner organization are essential components of successfully completing your service-learning.

Instructions for reviewing service-learning opportunities matched with this course will be presented on the first day of class. To explore available options, visit the [Carlson Center](#) online and follow the service-learning links. Registration opens at 8 am on Friday, April 5 and closes on 5 pm on Monday, April 8.

All students are expected to complete an orientation with their selected service-learning organization as soon as possible after registering. Once you register online and receive a confirmation email from the Carlson Center, contact your organization by phone and/or email to either 1) confirm your attendance at an already scheduled orientation or 2) to schedule an orientation if no specific date/time was listed in your position description. Orientations should occur during the second week of the quarter and no later than the third week.

If you do service learning, you will write a midquarter assessment of your learning experience. Your final paper will, among other things, integrate your field-based learning your learning from the rest of the course. Your final paper grade will take into consideration your site supervisor’s evaluation of your service contribution. You will also make a short presentation in quiz section about what you did, what you learned, and how you relate your service learning experience to the course material.

Group action projects offer a more creative hands-on learning experience. These groups will involve 4 or 5 students in a collaborative response to our study: political ecology of the world food system. While action projects are likely to be more challenging than service learning because they are self-organized, they can also be more gratifying for the same reason. Your project might be part of an existing endeavor or it might be your group's own creation. It might be an educational initiative, it might be an artistic creation, or it might contribute to an existing campaign. Your audience could be on campus, off campus, in person, or online. Whatever your group decides to do, your project should be complete by June 3 and should grow out of a fair and sensible division of labor.

Action groups will submit a short project proposal and have a mandatory meeting with their TA and/or professor by midquarter. The point is to give you teaching team a clear idea of what you're up to so that we can offer some guidance. For the final paper, students in action groups will, among other things, integrate their field-based learning with what they have learned from the rest of the course. They will also make a short presentation in quiz section about the project in the last week of classes.

If you choose to write a **research paper**, you will first write a short research proposal (including bibliography of preliminary research) outlining your research question. Your paper should frame a **specific solution to a problem in the world food system and how you will go about answering your question**. Note that your paper should have an international component and aim to integrate the political, economic, environmental and social dimensions of the solution you have chosen. Optional W credit is available and will require additional work. Please inform your TA by April 9 if you wish to receive W credit and we will establish a separate timeline for your assignments.

You will discuss your idea with your TA and submit your research proposal in midquarter. Aim to touch upon the political, economic, environmental and social dimensions of your proposed food solution. *This is a mandatory meeting*; without it, your TA will not accept your final paper. Your proposal should also cite at least five authoritative sources on your topic. Your TA's feedback on your proposal will offer you some guidance in the research and writing stage of your project. Your final 7-9 page research paper will be due via Canvas on Friday, June 7. In order to share the results of your research, you will give a brief presentation of your research in quiz section.

Late papers

Late papers are not accepted without a medical excuse. All requests on these matters must be made through the professor before the due date.

Academic dishonesty

Plagiarism and other cases of cheating will be handled in accordance with University policy. This whole [UW webpage](#) is worth a read, but here's an important excerpt:

One of the most common forms of cheating is plagiarism, using another's words or ideas without proper citation. [This includes]:

1. Using another writer's words without proper citation...
2. Using another writer's ideas without proper citation...
3. Citing your source but reproducing the exact words of a printed source without quotation marks...
4. Borrowing the structure of another author's phrases or sentences without crediting the author from whom it came...
5. Borrowing all or part of another student's paper or using someone else's outline to write your own paper.

6. Using a paper writing "service" or having a friend write the paper...
You will receive a zero on any assignment including plagiarized portions and you will be reported to the committee on academic misconduct for violations of academic integrity.

Notice: *The University has a license agreement with VeriCite, an educational tool that helps prevent or identify plagiarism from Internet resources. Your instructor may use the service in this class by requiring that assignments are submitted electronically to be checked by VeriCite. The VeriCite Report will indicate the amount of original text in your work and whether all material that you quoted, paraphrased, summarized, or used from another source is appropriately referenced.*

Grade appeal process

1. Wait 24 hours after receiving a graded assignment to reflect upon the instructor's comments.
2. Provide a typed statement to the TA explaining why you believe your grade received should be altered, being specific about why more points should be given for a particular answer). This must be about the substance of your work, not the effort you put into it or the class as a whole.
3. Bring the work and your written concerns to the TA's office hours within one week of receiving the graded assignment for discussion. Anything beyond one week will not be considered.
4. Your TA will reread the work, re-evaluate it if appropriate, and return to you within 2 days. If you are still dissatisfied, please bring your appeal directly to the professor within 2 days upon receipt of your TA's decision. Your professor will either regrade the assignment or ask another TA to do so. Please note that if the appeal comes to the professor, s/he may determine that your assignment deserves a lower grade.

Disabled Student Provisions

Disability Resources for Students (DRS) offers resources and coordinates reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. If you have not yet established services through DRS, but have a temporary or permanent disability that requires accommodations (this can include but not limited to; mental health, attention-related, learning, vision, hearing, physical or health impacts), you are welcome to contact DRS at 206-543-8924, or uwdrs@uw.edu. See [this website](#).

Student Support Services

The [Counseling Center](#) and [Hall Health](#) are excellent resources on campus that many UW students utilize. Students may get help with study skills, career decisions, substance abuse, relationship difficulties, anxiety, depression, or other concerns.

***PRELIMINARY* SCHEDULE of LECTURES and ASSIGNMENTS**

(Please refer to course website for updates and details.)

- 4/2 Introduction to the course -- no readings
Presentation of the syllabus
- 4/4 Industrialization, Science and Food
READ: Michael Pollan, *In Defense of Food*, Part I

Recommended:

Tom Standage, *An Edible History of Humanity* (Walker and Company, 2009).

Marion Nestle, *What to Eat* (North Point Press, 2006).

Harvey Blatt, *America's Food: What You Don't Know About What You Eat* (MIT Press, 2008).

Tamara Thompson, *Fast Food*. (Greenhaven Press, 2015).

- 4/9 Why We Eat What We Eat
READ: Pollan, *In Defense of Food*, Part II and as much of Part III as you wish;
Julie Guthman, ["The Food Police: Why Michael Pollan Makes Me Want to Eat Cheetos"](#)
Video clips: "Industrial Ingredients"

Recommended:

Daniel Imhoff, *Food Fight: The Citizen's Guide to a Food and Farm Bill* (University of California Press, 2007).

Eric Schlosser, *Fast Food Nation* (HarperCollins, 2002).

- 4/10 Action groups created

- 4/11 Linking Person, Planet & Politics in the World Food System
READ: Pollan, *In Defense of Food*, Part III;
Norah MacKendrick and Lindsay M. Stevens, "Taking Back a Little Bit of Control": Managing the Contaminated Body Through Consumption;"
Jennifer McNulty, ["Shopping Our Way to Safety"](#)

- 4/16 What is Food? When is Food? Thinking Systemically About Food
READ: Carolan, *The Real Cost of Cheap Food*, Chapter 1 (pp. 1-14).
Michael Maniates, "Individualization"
["Thinking in Systems" SlideShare](#)

Excerpts from Complexity Academy's Course on Complexity Theory:
[Systems Thinking](#); [Systems Theory](#); [Nonlinear Systems](#); [Earth Systems Science](#)

Stockholm Resilience Centre, ["How to apply resilience thinking"](#)

- 4/17 **ACTION PROJECT PROPOSALS DUE ON CANVAS**
"HUNGRY PLANET" ASSIGNMENT POSTED

- 4/18 Globalization and the World Food Economy
READ: Carolan, Chapter 2; Brown, Chapters 1-3 and 7

- 4/23 "Free" Trade, Food and the WTO
READ: Clapp, Chapter 3; Carolan, Chapter 3; Amartya Sen, "Why Half the Planet is Hungry" and Vandana Shiva, "The Real Reasons for Hunger" in www.globalpolicy.org

Recommended:

Merlinda D. Ingco and John D. Nash, *Agriculture and the WTO: Creating a Trading System for Development* (World Bank, 2005).

Peter M. Rosset, *Food is Different: Why the WTO Should Get Out of Agriculture* (Zed, 2006).

Gabriela Steier and Kiran K. Patel, *International Food Law and Policy*. (Springer, 2016.)

4/25 Stuffed and Starved: The Paradox of Obesity and Hunger

READ: Carolan, Chap 4 & 9.

Video: "Silent Killer"

Recommended:

Tony Weiss, *The Global Food Economy: The Battle for the Future of Farming* (Zed Books, 2007).

Fred Whitford et al., *The benefits of pesticides: a story worth telling*. (Purdue University Extension Service, with Dow Agrosiences), 2006).

4/24 "HUNGRY PLANET" PAPERS DUE ON CANVAS

4/25 Inside the Commodity Chain

READ: Richard Robbins, essays on beef and sugar from *Global Problems and the Culture of Capitalism* (Allyn and Bacon, 2007); Brown, Chapter 9, "China and the Soybean Challenge"

Video: "King Corn" (inside the U.S. corn commodity chain)

4/28 RESEARCH PROPOSALS DUE ON CANVAS

4/30 Race, Class and Gender in the Food System

READ: Raj Patel, "The Color of Food;" other readings TBA

5/2 The Oil We Eat

READ: Lester Brown, TBA; Tom Philpott, "The Dark Side of Nitrogen" at

<http://www.grist.org/article/series/the-n2-dilemma-is-america-fertilizing-disaster>

Video excerpts: *Cuba: The Accidental Revolution*, Part 1

Recommended:

Vandana Shiva, *Soil, Not Oil: Climate Change, Peak Oil and Food Insecurity* (Women Unlimited, 2009).

Richard Heinberg, *Peak Everything: Waking Up to the Century of Declines* (New Society, 2007).

5/5 SERVICE LEARNING MIDQUARTER ASSESSMENTS DUE ON CANVAS

5/7 Ecological Essentials: Sun, Water, Soil, Climate

READ: Carolan, Chapter 6; Brown, Chapters 5, 6, and 8; Wes Jackson, "Tackling the Oldest Environmental Problem: Agriculture and Its Impact on Soil" from Heinberg and Lerch (eds.), *The Postcarbon Reader*; "UN says sustainable farming can help close emissions gap"

<http://blogs.worldwatch.org/nourishingtheplanet/un-says-sustainable-farming-can-help-close-global-emissions-gap/>

Recommended:

Jennifer Clapp, *Corporate Power in Global Agrifood Governance* (MIT Press, 2009).

- 5/9 Anatomy (and Trajectory) of a Crisis: The 2008 World Food Crisis and Beyond
READ: Brown, Chapter 4; Frederick Kaufman, "The Food Bubble: How Wall Street Starved Millions and Got Away With It" *Harpers* <http://frederickkaufman.typepad.com/files/the-food-bubble-pdf.pdf>; John Vidal, "The Great Biofuel Hoax" at <http://www.globalpolicy.org/>; Tim Wise, "[Two Road Diverged in the World Food Crisis](#);" David Rosenberg, "Food and Arab Spring" at <http://www.gloria-center.org/2011/10/food-and-the-arab-spring/>

Recommended:

Rosamond Naylor et al., "The Ripple Effect: Biofuels, Food Security and the Environment" http://foodsecurity.stanford.edu/publications/the_ripple_effect_biofuels_food_security_and_the_environment/

Brown, *Who Will Feed China?* (Norton 1995).

Bryan Lohmar and Fred Gale, "Who Will China Feed?" (USDA), www.ers.usda.gov/AmberWaves/June08/PDF/ChinaFeed.pdf

- 5/14 Food Security and (or vs.?) Food Sovereignty on a Finite Earth
READ: Brown, Chapters 10-11; "Organic India rice outproduces GMOs," <http://grist.org/food/miracle-grow-indian-farmers-smash-crop-yield-records-without-gmos/>; Yanzhong Huang, "China's Corrupt Food Chain," New York Times, August 17, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/18/opinion/chinas-corrupt-food-chain.html?pagewanted=all&r=0>; John Vidal, "How Food And Water Are Driving a 21st Century Land Grab" at <http://www.globalpolicy.org/>

Recommended:

Lester Brown, "Rethinking Food Production for a World of 8 billion" in grist.org (e-reserve)

Hannah Wittman, Annette Desmarais, and Nettie Wiebe (eds.), *Food Sovereignty: Reconnecting Food, Nature and Community* (Food First, 2010).

- 5/16 Eating Animals
READ: Carolan, Chapter 5, "Cheap Meat;" Danielle Nierenberg, "Rethinking the Global Meat Industry," *State of the World 2006*; George Monbiot, "I was wrong about veganism..." <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2010/sep/06/meat-production-veganism-deforestation> Derek Beres, "Vegetarianism as a Political (and Religious) Tool" <http://bigthink.com/21st-century-spirituality/vegetarianism-as-a-political-and-religious-tool>; Marilyn McKenna, "Imagining a Post-Antibiotics Future" <https://medium.com/editors-picks/892b57499e77>. Tooodle around on websites on different sides of the vegetarian/omnivore/vegan debate. Start with <http://www.britishmeat.com/49.htm>, <http://www.beyondveg.com/>, www.factoryfarmmap.org

Recommended:

Frances Moore Lappe and Anne Lappe, *Hope's Edge: The Next Diet for a Small Planet* (Tarcher, 2003).

Lierre Keith, *The Vegetarian Myth: Food, Justice and Sustainability* (PM Press, 2009).

Carol J. Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-vegetarian Critical Theory* (Continuum, 2010).

- 5/21 Reductionism, Holism and Systems Thinking: Rethinking Food
READ: Karen Litfin, "Thinking Like a Planet: Toward a Gaian Food System;" Stephen Buhner,

“Living Medicine” http://thesunmagazine.org/issues/468/living_medicine

Recommended:

Paul and Anne Ehrlich, “Can Global Collapse Be Avoided?”

<http://rspb.royalsocietypublishing.org/content/280/1754/20122845.full.pdf>

and response by Michael J. Kelly at

<http://rspb.royalsocietypublishing.org/content/280/1767/20131193.full>

Lester Brown, “Peak Soil is No Joke: Civilization’s Foundation is Eroding”

<http://www.grist.org/article/civilizations-foundation-eroding>.

Thomas Homer-Dixon, *The Upside of Down* (Island Press, 2006).

Michael Tierney, *The Value of Convenience* (SUNY Press, 1993).

Thomas Princen, *The Logic of Sufficiency* (MIT Press, 2005).

- 5/23 What’s in a Seed? From Seed Saving to Genetically Engineered Food
READ: John Seabrook, “Sowing for Apocalypse” *The New Yorker*, August 2007; and TBA

Recommended:

Guy Cook, *Genetically Modified Language* (Routledge, 2004).

Nina Pederhoff, *Mendel in the Kitchen: A Scientist’s View of Genetically Modified Food* (Joseph Henry, 2006).

Robert Paarlberg, *The Politics of Precaution: Genetically Modified Crops in Developing Countries* (International Food Policy Research Institute, 2001).

Mark Pollack and Gregory Shaffer, *When Cooperation Fails: The International Law and Politics of Genetically Modified Food* (Oxford University Press, 2009).

Indur Goklany, “The Future of Food,” *Forum for Applied Research and Public Policy*, Summer 2001.

- 5/28 Food, Culture and Identity
READ: Carolan, Chapter 10; Pollan, “Why Cook?” *The Sun* March 2014; Julie Guthman, “Fast Food/organic food: reflexive tastes and the making of yuppie chow,” *Social and Cultural Geography*, 4,1; Ellen Posman, “Veggieburger in Paradise” in Etta Madden and Martha Finch, eds. *Eating in Eden: Food and American Utopias* (University of Nebraska Press, 2006), pp. 239-257; Ilan Zvi Baron, [“Reading Cookbooks: Israeli Cookbooks and the International Relations of the Every Day”](#)

Recommended:

Brian Halweil, *Eat Here: Homegrown Pleasures in a Global Supermarket* (Norton, 2004).

James Watson and Melissa Caldwell, eds. *The Cultural Politics of Food and Eating* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2005).

David Goodman, E. Melanie DuPuis, Michael K. Goodman, *Alternative Food Networks: Knowledge, Practice and Politics* (Routledge, 2012).

- 5/30 The New Food Politics
READ: Bomford, “Getting Fossil Fuels Off the Plate” and Erika Allen, “Growing Community Food Systems” from Richard Heinberg and Daniel Lerch (eds.), *The Post-Carbon Reader*;

"Food" from Karen Litfin, *Ecovillages: Lessons for Sustainable Community*; Oxfam, "Growing a Better Future;" Wendell Berry, "The Pleasures of Eating;" Vicki Robin, "Letter from the Future;" Frances Moore Lappe, "Everyday We Choose;" Jalaja Bonheim, "The Ultimate Miracle Worker"

Video clips: "Nourish," "Slow Food," and "Buyer Be Fair"

Recommended:

Carlo Petrini and Alice Waters, *Slow Food Nation* (Rizzoli Ex Libris, 2007)

H.C. Flores, *Food Not Lawns* (Chelsea Green, 2006)

Edible Communities website: <http://www.ediblecommunities.com/content/>

6/5 **PRESENTATIONS IN SECTION**

6/10 **FINAL PAPERS DUE ON CANVAS.**

ENJOY YOUR SUMMER!