

SOCIOLOGY 341
Sociology of Agriculture: The Global Food System
ST. FRANCIS XAVIER UNIVERSITY, Fall 2019
Dr. Riley Chisholm

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Office Hours:
Mondays 1 PM -2 PM
Tuesdays 11:30 AM -12:30PM
Thursdays 10 AM -12:00 PM

Class Times: Tuesdays 9:45-11 am and Thursdays at 8:15-9:30 am (Blocks Z1 & Z2)
Classroom: Mulrone Hall 022



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.

The current 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. The course is conducted

as an interactive engagement such that close readings of all texts is required by students prior to class. At least one farm visit is also included. Please note: This syllabus only draws from news and other media sources that are free of corporate control.

Required Reading:

1. Rather than purchase a course kit, students access all readings (which are open-access, or otherwise publicly available online), using the links embedded in the course syllabus.
2. Qualman, Darrin 2019. *Civilization Critical: Energy, food, nature and the future*. Fernwood: Halifax. (Available at the StFX Bookstore)
3. Kimmerer, Robin Wall. (2015) *Braiding Sweetgrass. Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants*. Milkweed Editors: Minneapolis, Minnesota. (Available at the StFX Bookstore)

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: (Assignment type, (percentage of grade) and due date)

A. Community Outreach Assignment (40%) **October 31st (in class presentations)**

B. Major Paper 30% **Thursday November 28th in class**

C. Final Exam 30% **TBA**

Long description of assignment requirements:

Community Outreach Assignment: Creating a Knowledge Flood (40%)

A Knowledge Flood is a form of civic democracy accomplished through targeted distribution of 'knowledge interventions'—concise, fact-driven messaging that serves the public interest. This technique is useful because, while employing the language of climate destruction (flood) it re-politicizes public space as part of the 'threatened' commons by troubling/disrupting dominant discourses often perpetuated by corporations and industry that increasingly colonise, organize and shape public space and discourse. The goal of the Knowledge Flood is to saturate public space with the intellectual commons—a wave of human academic, scientific, grassroots and Indigenous knowledge-as-resistance, that serve the interests of life on the planet.

Students will determine their Community Outreach Plan and submit it in writing to me no later than **Sept. 12th** for approval. I will return these to you with comments no later than the **17th of Sept.**

Students may choose to work together in groups. Students will be graded on the extent of their intellectual rigour and accuracy, cooperation, punctuality, commitment, creativity, self-direction, thoughtfulness, professionalism and effectiveness.

Here are the basic steps to follow:

- a. For this assignment, students will select one or more issues that are directly relevant to climate and agriculture/farming. Some ideas are: water, soil, sustainability, food security, glyphosate and cancer, obesity, and rural poverty and its connection to farming.

- b. Students will then conduct basic research on the issue(s) to give both a local and global context. Note: Issues raised in class are certainly valid for use for this assignment, as are all of the resources employed in class.
- c. Significant ideas, facts and knowledge about the issue will then be translated onto public space—and be creative about how this might be most effective—to ‘flood’ zones in the Town of Antigonish with public-interest knowledge.
- d. Students then determine the most effective space and time in which to produce the ‘flood’. *Cooperation with person(s) responsible for managing public spaces must be respectfully consulted.* In order to meet the requirements of this assignment, students must document and demonstrate what they have accomplished. (This may mean a short video, or an invite to an event or space for a viewing, or the provision of a series of photographs).
- e. On **October 31st**, in class, we will set aside 5-10 minutes per group, who will present their work to the class. *Should more time be necessary (such as in the case of the screening of a short film, or the presentation of a workshop for kids), groups should let me know and I can schedule it in.*

Knowledge floods have been/can be accomplished in a variety of ways (The following represent just a few of the possibilities):

- a. **The Corn Bomb:** Students made *connections between weapons of mass destruction and industrial agriculture*, producing a set of yellow statements (sticky-notes) , assembled in the shape of a cob of corn. This kind of ‘art-meets-politics’ technique can be extended to any issue associated with agriculture. Sticky notes also can be disbursed as individual ‘idea-seeds’ placed on the back of bathroom doors, in the halls, in other spaces and places of human convergence. But you only have one sentence, or so. So, use your words, and note papers carefully.
- b. **Tree Libraries:** Students investigate the issue of *food security* (in NS, we have approximately 2 days!), identify the basic reasons for food insecurity and offer suggestions about how to move to a food security model. These small messages, each about 1-2 sentences long could then be transposed onto artfully crafted leaves that are hung by twine throughout the trees lining Main Street.
- c. **Chalkboard Wall:** Students produce a wooden wall that they cover over in chalkboard paint. They install these along the walls of the student union building (SUB), and provide a guiding statement and question at the top of the wall that directs passerby’s how to respond., such as ‘*Are you concerned about food security in Nova Scotia? Tell us why*’. Passerby’s are then provided chalk to write their response. The wall remains in the SUB for Climate Democracy Week. (This activity requires about 80-100\$ in supplies: board, paint, brushes and chalk).

- d. **Youth & Sustainable Agriculture Workshop:** A major challenge is communicating with children about the importance of sustainable agriculture and its relationship to climate change. This can be a challenging topic as the stakes are so high, and there is a risk of children feeling powerless and overwhelmed. For this option, students draw upon class-based and external resources (maybe advice from a Professor of Education at StFX) to develop a workshop in which young people (Ages 10-13) get engaged in conversation about *agriculture and sustainability*. For this option, the workshop could be presented in our class and modified in accordance with reactions to the curriculum. To do the workshop well, the following questions must be answered, “When I was 10 years old, what do I wish I had been told about climate change and its relationship to industrial farming and foodways? ; “What do children of this age group need to know and, how can you explain it in a way that honours a human-type being at age 10—not to overwhelm or under-communicate the seriousness of our current situation, and; “ What thinking and feeling tools are owed to this group of young people at this moment in human history? How may we furnish them with these tools so that they can use them well?”
- e. **Short Film:** Highlight local and international issues surrounding the use of *glyphosate on industrially operated farm lands*. The goal is to educate the public about glyphosate—what does it do to our bodies, how does it get into our bodies, how it is regulated both domestically and internationally, what are the health issues, who is the biggest user of glyphosate, what are the techniques of industry protectionism, and what are some of the local political issues surrounding glyphosate. Be sure to make use of resources available through the Pesticide Action Network (UK): <https://www.pan-uk.org/glyphosate/> and independent media (non-corporate) media such as: <https://www.democracynow.org/search?utf8=√&query=glyphosate&commit=Search>
- Give a film screening in class.

B. Major Paper (30%) Due: Thursday November 28th

Length: 8-10 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. Vegan, vegetarian diets...are they really 'sustainable? How so?

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.

Note: Spelling, grammar, word choice and tone matter in the assessment of your submission. Please be careful not to give this assignment superficial treatment. I am seeking depth of analysis and contemplation of serious issues that are worth our time and consideration.

Schedule of Weekly Readings, Tests and Assignments

Week 1: Introduction: Why a sociology of agriculture?

(Sep. 3rd and 5th)

- Review syllabus, develop carpooling and note-sharing contacts, begin discussing Community Outreach Assignments and provide copies of the Outreach Plan Forms to be submitted for approval at the end of Week 2 (**Sep. 12th**).

Week 2: Food Regimes & the Green Revolution

(Sep. 10th and 12th)

- 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>
- 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
- Perkins, J.H., (1990). The Rockefeller Foundation and the Green Revolution, 1941- 1956. *Agriculture and Human Values*, 7(3-4):6-18. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/248776767_The_Rockefeller_Foundation_and_the_green_revolution_1941-1956
- **Submit Community Outreach Assignment Plans for approval no later than Sept. 12th**

Week 3: Agriculture and Climate Change (Sep. 17th and 19th)

- Community Outreach Assignment Plans will be returned at the start of class, Sept. 17th
- Guest speaker: XRNS Patrick Yancey <https://actionnetwork.org/forms/join-extinction-rebellion-nova-scotia>
- Regular class time on Thursday Sept. 19th is cancelled and moved to: 5:15-6:30 PM for a lecture, 'Climate 101', by Dr. Andrew MacDougall, Earth Science.
- Note: Sept 20th is the Global Climate Strike: <https://globalclimatestrike.net>

Week 4: Linear and circular (agri) systems (Sept. 24th and 27th)

- Qualman, D. *Introduction and Chapters 1-4*. (pages 1-40)
- [http://www.yesmagazine.org/pdf/49/JusttheFacts Poster8.5x11.pdf](http://www.yesmagazine.org/pdf/49/JusttheFacts%20Poster8.5x11.pdf)
- Class on Thursday the 26th is moved to Friday September 27th: Students will attend an Educational Forum from either 2-4 PM, or 6:30-8 PM. Location TBA.
- *Braiding Sweetgrass* Chapters, "A Culture of Gratitude" and "Allegiance to the Beans".
- Gaard, Greta. 2015. 'Ecofeminism and climate change'. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 49, Pp. 20-33. (This article will be sent to you in the first weeks of class).

Week 5: Understanding energy (Oct 1st and 3rd)

- Qualman, D. *Chapters 11, 19, 25, 28 and 31*. (pages 76-79; 154-158; 203-208; 235-250; 260-265).

Week 6: Peasant agriculture and climate change (*Oct 8th and 10th)

- **OCTOBER 8th: NO CLASS TODAY.**
- Via Campesina Film: 'Together we can cool the planet': <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eKlftq7ljAs> (16 mins)

- A. Desmarais. (2002) Peasants Speak: The Vía Campesina: Consolidating an International Peasant and Farm Movement, *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 29:2, 91-124. (This article will be provided to you at the start of classes).

Week 7: Reading break

(Oct 15th and 17th)

- No classes this week

Week 8: The Grocery Industrial Complex

(Oct 22nd and 24th)

- OPIRG, 'The Supermarket Tour' Available at:
http://www.fairtradebarrie.ca/pdf/wpirg_supermarket_tour.pdf

Week 9: Indigenous Worldviews

(Oct 29th and 31st)

- *Braiding Sweetgrass* Chapter: "Windigo Footprints"
- Film: Seeking Netuklimik Available at:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jrk3ZI_2Dd0 (22 mins)
- **October 31st: Community Outreach Assignment Presentations (5-10 mins each)**

Week 10: Sustainable farming and carbon sequestration: A focus on graziers

(Nov 5th and 7th)

- Farm Visit TBA
- *Braiding Sweetgrass*, Chapter: "Putting Down Roots"

Week 11: Soil, and why it's sociological.

(Nov 12th and 14th)

- "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
- Film, *Dirt*
- Once they are available, I will be providing full details of the events planned for ***Climate Democracy Week, Nov. 14th-21st***.
 - Until then, students are encouraged to attend the *Official Opening*, and *Keynote Lecture* by Dr. Blair Feltmate, in the evening of the 14th.
 - Please also note that a full day of workshops will be available at the **People's Place Public Library on Saturday Nov. 16th**. Students are encouraged to attend

as they are able, but especially, the *Farming Workshop hosted by the Department of Agriculture from 2-3:30 PM.*

Week 12: Climate Democracy Week

(Nov 19th and 21st)

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- 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.
https://international.uiowa.edu/sites/international.uiowa.edu/files/file_uploads/FoodMovementsWinter2010bckgrndr.pdf
- “The Biggest Little Farm” Free Film Screening at the Main Street Cineplex (Wednesday 20th) 5:30 PM
- Closing Speaker of Climate Democracy Week, ‘*On Climate Grief*’, Thursday Nov. 21st: Dr. Ashlee Cunsolo, Memorial University. Time TBA
- Cunsolo. And K. Landman, 2017. “Prologue” and “Introduction”, in *Mourning Nature: Hope at the Heart of Ecological Loss and Grief*, McGill-Queen’s University Press: Montreal, pp. xiii-26. (*This article will be sent to you in the first weeks of classes*).

Week 13: Save our seed workshop

(Nov. 26th and 28th)

- 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=C-bK8X2s1kI> (30 mins)

Major Paper Due Thursday, November 28th