



Philip H. Howard

(<https://www.msu.edu/~howardp/>)

CSUS 855

The Political Ecology of Food

Fall 2016

blended classroom (2 hours) and online (1 hour) format

3.0 credit hours

Mondays, 12:40 to 2:30pm, 306 Natural Resources

Instructor: Phil Howard Office Phone: 355-8431 Office Address: 316 Natural Resources E-mail: howardp@msu.edu

Brief Description Interactions between food, society and the environment. Ecological impacts and sociopolitical power in international and domestic contexts. **Course Description** This interdisciplinary course will apply political ecology (critical political economy, with attention to environmental changes) to specific foods and food systems. We will explore food production, consumption, and the links in between in the United States, as well as in global/international contexts. We will also apply theories and methods from political ecology to our own specific research interests. Doing so will require understanding the diversity of approaches encompassed by the broad field of political ecology, as well as directly engaging in the difficult task of bridging the social and natural sciences. Issues that will receive particular attention include technologies, scale, development strategies, labor issues, knowledge, standards and globalization. **Learning Objectives**

- Develop a scholarly capacity for analyzing the interactions between food, society and the environment, drawing on disciplines including anthropology, biology, development studies, ecology, economics, geography, history, political science and sociology.
- Develop a better understanding of how to synthesize political economic and ecological frameworks through case studies of food systems.
- Critically examine key themes in food research, with a focus on ecological sustainability, political participation and social inequalities.

Course Approach This course is organized as a small seminar with a commitment to developing collaborative learning among all who participate.

Course Prerequisites Graduate standing or permission from instructor. CSUS 811 (Community, Food and Agriculture: A Survey) is recommended, but not required.

Course Assignments and Evaluation Assignments (100 points each) include:

1. required readings and participation in class discussions
2. critical review of a scholarly book related to the political ecology of food
3. weekly **online** reflections applying the readings and class discussion from the previous week, and final self-evaluation
4. group project that critically applies political ecology to a food issue in Michigan

Weekly readings - you are expected to come to class prepared to answer the following questions about the weekly readings:

1. *what did you agree/disagree with the most? OR what did you find most useful*
2. *what did the readings potentially leave out?*
- 3a. *what question(s) did the readings raise?* 3b. *what were you able to uncover about this question?* (This will require that you seek out and read at least one additional article or chapter in an effort to answer your question. It's OK if you're not able to answer the question, just share what you learned in the process.)

Online Component

Each week (beginning in week 2) you will relate concepts from the previous class (readings and discussion) to your daily life and/or current events in an essay of approximately 500 words. For example, you might a) discuss how your food consumption behaviors have changed as a result of learning about the labor practices on tea plantations, b) compare and contrast policies developed for leafy greens in the United States to other food products, such as processed beef, c) describe how you might incorporate political ecology concepts in your thesis or dissertation research, or d) numerous other possibilities of your choosing. The intention is not require a significant amount of additional research, but to stimulate retrieval of the previous week's content, encourage memory formation, and reinforce connections to other subjects (see Brown et al. 2014, *Make It Stick*, for more on the cognitive research supporting these outcomes). You will also be asked to read the reflections of other students, and brief responses are welcome (but not required).

Group Project

Peer groups will also engage in research in Michigan communities to apply concepts of political ecology. Each group will investigate a specific food or food system, the results of which will be made publicly available. There are a number of possibilities, but one example from a previous class involved conducting an inventory of all wine brands and varieties at 20 different retailers (n=3,600), tracing the ownership of all of these varieties (approximately 1,000 firms), creating an information graphic of these relationships using Gephi software, and analyzing ownership diversity available to consumers at different types of retailers (for more detail see <https://www.msu.edu/~howardp/wine.html> (<https://www.msu.edu/~howardp/wine.html>)). Similar methods could be applied to other foods, or different questions could be explored (through subjects such as food trucks, community supported agriculture farms, cottage food laws, heritage pork producers, seed libraries, retail cooperatives, Naturally Grown certification, etc.).

Grading scale for the course (by percentage of the 400 points obtained): 94 to 100% – 4.0 87 to 93% – 3.5 80 to 86% – 3.0 75 to 79% – 2.5 70 to 74% – 2.0

Required Texts

- Vandermeer, John. 2011. *The Ecology of Agroecosystems*. Jones & Bartlett Publishers.
- Tsing, Anna L. 2015. *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*. Princeton University Press.
- Galt, Ryan E. 2014. *Food Systems in an Unequal World: Pesticides, Vegetables, and Agrarian Capitalism in Costa Rica*. University of Arizona Press.

Recommended Text (recommended to read before first class)

- Robbins, Paul. 2012. *Political Ecology: A Critical Introduction*. 2nd edition. Wiley-Blackwell

Additional readings as assigned (see below). **Schedule**

PART 1: INTRODUCTION

Week 1 (8/31) – Class introductions, formation of peer groups

Week 2 (9/12) – The Political Ecology of Food

- Galt, R. E. 2013. Placing food systems in first world political ecology: a review and research agenda. *Geography Compass*, 7(9), 637–658.
- Morgan, K. 2015. Nourishing the city: The rise of the urban food question in the Global North. *Urban Studies*, 52(8), 1379–1394.
- Baines, J. 2014. Food price inflation as redistribution: Towards a new analysis of corporate power in the world food system. *New Political Economy*, 19(1), 79–112.

Week 3 (9/19) – Agroecology Part 1

- Vandermeer, *The Ecology of Agroecosystems*, Chapters 1–4

Week 4 (9/26) – Agroecology Part 2

- Vandermeer, *The Ecology of Agroecosystems*, Chapters 5–8

Part 2: U.S. CASE STUDIES

Week 5 (10/3) – Scale

- DuPuis, E. M., & Block, D. 2008. Sustainability and scale: US milk–market orders as relocalization policy. *Environment and Planning A*, 40(8), 1987–2005.
- Stuart, D. 2011. 'Nature' is not guilty: foodborne illness and the industrial bagged salad. *Sociologia Ruralis*, 51(2), 158–174.
- Kremen, C., Iles, A., & Bacon, C. 2012. Diversified farming systems: an agroecological, systems-based alternative to modern industrial agriculture. *Ecology & Society* 17(4):44.

Week 6 (10/10) – Commodity Chains

- Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World*

Week 7 (10/17) – Technologies

- Friedberg, S. 2014. Moral economies and the cold chain. *Historical Research*, 88(239), 125–137.
- Guthman, J. 2002. Commodified meanings, meaningful commodities: Re-thinking production–consumption links through the organic system of provision. *Sociologia Ruralis*, 42(4), 295–311.
- Warner, K. D., Daane, K. M., Getz, C. M., Maurano, S. P., Calderon, S., & Powers, K. A. 2011. The decline of public interest agricultural science and the dubious future of crop biological control in California. *Agriculture and Human Values*, 28(4), 483–496.

Week 8 (10/24) – Critical Book Reviews due

• In-class presentations

- in-class presentations

Part 3 INTERNATIONAL/GLOBAL CASE STUDIES

Week 9 (10/31) – Development

- Perkins, J. H. 1990. The Rockefeller Foundation and the green revolution, 1941–1956. *Agriculture and Human Values*, 7(3–4), 6–18.
- Stone, G. D. 2007. Agricultural deskilling and the spread of genetically modified cotton in Warangal. *Current Anthropology*, 48(1), 67–103.
- Wield, D., Chataway, J., & Bolo, M. 2010. Issues in the political economy of agricultural biotechnology. *Journal of Agrarian Change*, 10(3), 342–366.

Week 10 (11/7) – Pesticides

- Galt, Food Systems in an Unequal World

Week 11 (11/14) – Standards

- Hatanaka, M., Bain, C., & Busch, L. 2005. Third-party certification in the global agrifood system. *Food Policy*, 30(3), 354–369.
- Mutersbaugh, T. 2002. The number is the beast: a political economy of organic-coffee certification and producer unionism. *Environment and Planning A*, 34(7), 1165–1184.
- Bacon, C. M. 2010. Who decides what is fair in fair trade? The agri-environmental governance of standards, access, and price. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 37(1), 111–147.

Week 12 (11/28) – Globalization; draft group project due

- Singer, M. 2014. Following the turkey tails: Neoliberal globalization and the political ecology of health. *Journal of Political Ecology*, 21, 438–451.
- Clapp, J. 2015. Distant agricultural landscapes. *Sustainability Science*, 10, 305–316.
- McMichael, P. 2014. Historicizing food sovereignty. *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 41, 933–957.

Final Exam (12/15)

Group Project/Presentations, and final self-evaluation due

Supplemental Readings

Books that may be considered for the critical review assignment may include (but are not limited to):

- Allen, P. 2004. *Together at the table: Sustainability and sustenance in the American agrifood system*. Penn State Press.
- Blay-Palmer, A. 2008. *Food fears: From industrial to sustainable food systems*. Ashgate Publishing, Ltd.
- Besky, S. 2013. *The Darjeeling distinction: Labor and justice on fair-trade tea plantations in India*. University of California Press.
- Bowen, S. 2015. *Divided spirits: Tequila, mezcal, and the politics of production*. University of California Press.
- DuPuis, E. M. 2002. *Nature's perfect food: How milk became America's drink*. NYU Press.
- Fischer, E. F., & Benson, P. B. 2006. *Broccoli and desire: Global connections and Maya struggles in postwar*

Guatemala. Stanford University Press.

- Freidberg, S. 2009. *Fresh: A perishable history*. Harvard University Press.
- Goodman, D., Dupuis, E. M., & Goodman, M. K. 2012. *Alternative food networks: Knowledge, practice, and politics*. Routledge.
- Grossman, L. S. 1998. *The political ecology of bananas: Contract farming, peasants, and agrarian change in the Eastern Caribbean*. University of North Carolina Press.
- Guthman, J. 2014. *Agrarian dreams: The paradox of organic farming in California*. 2nd edition. University of California Press.
- Holmes, Seth M. 2013. *Fresh fruit, broken bodies: Migrant farmworkers in the United States*. University of California Press.
- Jaffee, D. 2014. *Brewing justice: Fair trade coffee, sustainability, and survival*. 2nd edition. University of California Press.
- Jansen, K. 1998. *Political ecology, mountain agriculture, and knowledge in Honduras*. Thela Publishers.
- Kloppenburg, Jack R., Jr. 2004. *First the seed: The political economy of plant biotechnology*. 2nd edition. University of Wisconsin Press.
- Mintz, S. W. 1985. *Sweetness and power*. New York: Viking.
- Pachirat, T. 2011. *Every twelve seconds: Industrialized slaughter and the politics of sight*. Yale University Press.
- Paxson, H. 2013. *The life of cheese: Crafting food and value in America*. University of California Press.
- Perfecto, I., Vandermeer, J., & Wright, A. 2009. *Nature's matrix: Linking agriculture, conservation and food sovereignty*. Earthscan.
- Scott, J. C. 2009. *The art of not being governed: An anarchist history of upland Southeast Asia*. Yale University Press.
- Vandermeer, J. H., & Perfecto, I. 2013. *Breakfast of biodiversity: The political ecology of rain forest destruction*. 2nd edition. Food First Books.
- Weis, T. 2013. *The ecological hoofprint: The global burden of industrial livestock*. Zed Books.
- Wells, M. J. 1996. *Strawberry fields: Politics, class, and work in California agriculture*. Cornell University Press.
- West, P. 2012. *From modern production to imagined primitive: The social world of coffee from Papua New Guinea*. Duke University Press.
- Wright, A. 2005. *The death of Ramón González: The modern agricultural dilemma*. University of Texas Press.

Philip H. Howard email (<mailto:howardp@msu.edu>) <https://msu.edu/~howardp/csus855.html>