

Department of Community Sustainability

CSUS 463 – Food Fight: Politics of Food

Spring 2020

Monday and Wednesday, 12:40 – 2:00 pm

306 Natural Resources

Date of Final Exam: Monday, April 27, 2020, 12:45 - 2:45pm

Part 1: Course Information

Instructor: Wynne Wright, Ph.D.

Office: 330B Natural Resources

Phone: 517-884-1372

Email: wrigh325@msu.edu

Office Hours: Monday and Wednesday 2-3:00 pm & by appointment

Course Description

Food has become politicized in ways we never dreamed and as our cultural perceptions of risk change, the result is often ‘food fights’ – battles over what we eat, when we eat, and how. Whether it is politically conscious consumers, social movements, or policy-makers, understanding the socio-political climate and motivations for agri-food change is crucial for sustainability. This class will examine everyday forms of power, domination and resistance, in the food system, the symbolic power of food, as well as food and agriculture policy-making.

Our primary goal in this class will be to identify and analyze the ways that power – broadly defined as the ability to influence – shapes our food system. We begin with the premise that the production, distribution, retailing, and consumption of food involves power among different groups with divergent goals. Toward that end, we will focus on learning about how various groups seek to construct food as a problem and/or opportunity and how they attempt to influence culture and statecraft (i.e., policy-making), thus influencing what we eat. This means that even as we discuss a particular food issue as a problem (e.g., nutrition, diet, school lunch, hunger, activism, labeling, organic, markets, etc.) we will also work to understand how certain agrifood issues become political problems, in other words, we will examine *the process of politicizing*. This will allow us to explore how food problems gain our attention, and how people, policymakers, media and other institutions and social groups respond to food problems.



Official Course Description

Social power and its influence in US agrifood system. Structural and cultural issues related to politics of food consumption, production, labor, processing, retail, techno-science, policy, resistance movements.

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Objective and Course Approach

The objectives in this course are to:

1. Understand the power dynamics of food in the US.
2. Explore complex relationships between food and policy
3. Understand how power as being used as a median to shape our consumption practices
4. Build an understanding of academic research and scholarship in food politics.

We will rely upon a combination of methods to study food, agriculture, culture, and power in this course. I will frequently give 'mini-lectures' to clarify concepts and theories, but we will also rely heavily on discussion. I adhere to the school of thought that you get out of class what you put in it. Therefore, I hope to design a safe and rewarding learning environment, but my primary goal is to help you think analytically about food. That includes peeling back the layers of hidden social and political relations and meanings to fully understand what we eat and why. From time to time we will have guest speakers, field trips, and participate in document analysis to help us achieve this objective. Keep in mind that your personal encounters with food (and people) may not align with the empirical evidence that we discuss in class. Just because you(we) eat, this does not make us experts on food. This does not mean your insights are not valuable. Before you respond, ask yourself why a certain condition may be the case, how might your experience differ from others, why or what conditions might have given rise to set you and your experience apart from the empirical evidence? Openness and curiosity will help create a dynamic learning environment.

Required and Recommended Readings

All required readings are available in the following books and via a course Schoology website. A list of recommended readings will also be provided that I strongly urge you to try to read.

Required:

- Nestle, Marion. 2013. *Food Politics: How the Food Industry Influences Nutrition and Health*.
- Select Articles on-line via Schoology



Part 2: Course Evaluation

Evaluation for this course will be determined on the following criteria. Each of the criteria is more fully elaborated upon below.

Activity	Value (each)	Total Value
Attendance/Participation	2 pts	60 pts
Food & Meaning	20 pts	20 pts
Short Assignment 1	20 pts	20 pts
Short Assignment 2	20 pts	20 pts
Short Assignment 3	20 pts	20 pts
Final Exam	50 pts	50 pts
Total		190 pts

Grade	Percentage
4.0	94-100%
3.5	88-93%
3.0	83-87%
2.5	78-82%
2.0	73-77%
1.5	68-72%
1.0	60-67%
0.0	<60%



I. Attendance/Participation

All students are expected to regularly attend class, be on time, to complete the assigned readings PRIOR to each class meeting, and to participate in class discussions. This means being prepared, mindfully engaging with the material, engaging in respectful dialogue with your peers and the instructor, sharing your thoughts/questions in class, and volunteering constructive answers/comments to others' questions. Please do not use laptops during interactive class sessions (unless you are accessing an article), no cell phone usage will be permitted and no recording of class without my permission. Your attendance and engagement will make or break your experience in this course. Students who must miss class due to an excused absence must see me, with their excused absence, as early as possible. If you know you will need to miss in advance, please let me know as soon as possible. You are responsible for making up missed work. Only unexcused absences will impede your grade. For each class missed pass three, five percent of your total grade will be deducted.

A Pedagogical Note. Please review materials on the course Schoology site. Here you will find the syllabus, some of the course readings, and miscellaneous materials developed to help you excel at the assignments. Note that there is a reading guideline sheet that will be useful in helping you learn to read critically social science scholarship. Use this handout as a tool to complete each assignment. We will review how to set up a Schoology account on day one.

Assignments

Everyone must complete the "Food and Meaning" exercise (below) and the final exam. You are also required to complete 3 of the 5 short assignments.

Food and Meaning

What does food mean to you? Reflect on the place food has played in your life. Is there a particular food or custom that is very personal to you? Is there an experience or moment that food shaped your biography? It is a good idea to speak to family members to help resurrect memories about food and the attachment others might share with you on this issue. What do this/these memories have to do with your everyday eating, or special occasion eating? Who played a role in shaping this memory? How would you feel if your enjoyment of this food (or food practice, e.g. Sunday lunch with the family, canning tomatoes in August, etc) were threatened? What emotion do you most associate with this food or practice? What power does it hold over you (or what need does it fill in you)? Write a 3-4 page paper (double-spaced) in response to the questions above. Be prepared to share in class. DUE: Jan 15



Short Assignments

You will complete 3 of the following 5 assignments. Each should be 3-4 pages long (typed, double-spaced, with one-inch margins).

- Food Blogs ... DUE: Feb. 5
- Food and Statecraft ... DUE: Feb. 19
- Food Politics on T.V. ... DUE: March 18
- Food Politics Abroad ... DUE: April 1
- Food, Friends and Family ... DUE: April 13

I. Food Blogs

Students must examine two different food-related blogs during the semester (NOTE: for the purposes of this course, food related websites which change regularly and frequently will be considered blogs, e.g., epicurious.com, seriouseats.com, chow.com) and prepare a paper about the contents, focusing on such questions as:

- Who writes the blog?
- What claims are being made?
- What is the purpose of the blog?
- Who is the audience?
- Who sponsors the blog? Does the sponsorship affect the content/point of view/claims?
- Summarize the content of the blog - does it have a specialization/point of view/agenda?
- What is 'good' food, according to the blog, and why?
- Does the blog engage in 'food politics'? If so, in what ways?
- Is the blog trustworthy? Would you recommend it to a foodie friend, or someone just beginning to figure out what to eat?

You are free to choose whatever blogs you wish. They need not be American, and they can certainly focus on food matters of particular racial, religious, ethnic, national groups.

Check with me if you are not sure. DUE: Feb. 5

II. Food & Statecraft

Access the USDA website (www.usda.gov) and review the content. What types of food issues are raised on the website? What type of reports did the administration provide? What is your assessment of the quality of the reports? Do they have a political context? If so, what is political about the content and reports? Does the report confront this tension or gloss over it? Does this improve or harm citizens understanding of agriculture and food? Why? DUE: Feb. 19



III. Food Politics on T.V.

Find a recent food advertisement on Television or on-line and analyze its content. Describe the ad. What are they trying to persuade you to do in the ad? What frames are they using to evoke emotion/to appeal to you? What values are either evident or implied? How would you assess its accuracy? Do you think it is effective? Why? DUE: March 18

IV. Food Politics Abroad

Choose a country other than the U.S. and investigate the nature of its food politics. Describe the conflict? Who is involved? Where does the power lie? What is at stake economically, socially and culturally with various outcomes? What role does the state (federal government) play in this conflict? How much control does the government have over the outcome? This case you select must be a conflict in process – not one that has been resolved. DUE: April 1

V. Food, Friends and Family Interviews

Interview several friends or family members, asking them about their food preferences – why they eat what they eat. You may need to help them by focusing on trending dietary patterns such as organic, vegetarian, vegan, GMOs, local/conventional. You can usually start this conversation by asking them where they buy their food – why do they shop there? Are they mindful of their eating patterns? Why do they eat what they eat? Do they mention political issues in their discussion of their food choices? How did your interviewees receive their information about their food choices? How large was the role of the news media as a source? How large was the role of science in their choices? DUE: April 13



Part 3: Course and University Policies

Punctuality

Please be sure to arrive at class on time. Come to see me as soon as possible if you anticipate that you will regularly be late. If you are consistently late, without having spoken to me, you will be counted absent. Email me if you know you will miss a class.

Cell Phones

Cell phone interruptions are detrimental to the learning of all. Turn them off or leave them at home.

Class List Serve

I will provide a list serve for this class to send out readings, announcements opportunities, etc. It is essential that students look at email daily to consult any messages I have posted.

Late Work

All written work that is not submitted on time will be penalized 10% for each day that it is late. Please save us both a lot of pain and suffering and turn your work in on time. Accommodations can be made for emergency situations, but I must be contacted in advance to grant an extension (e.g., in cases of illness or death in the family).

Grief Absence Request

All students requesting approved absence due to grief must complete the Grief Absence Request Form found on the RO home page (<https://reg.msu.edu/>) under 'Student Services - Grief Absence Request Form.'

Disability Accommodations

Any student who feels that she/he may need accommodations based on a disability should see me during the first two weeks of the term so appropriate and timely arrangements can be made.

Academic Integrity

To cultivate a productive and safe academic environment, we must all agree to practice academic integrity. I assume that you understand this means - conducting your own work without the influence of others via cheating or plagiarism. If you are not clear how to reference the work of others develop these skills immediately. I will uphold this practice and I expect all

Commented [ML2]: This is the recommended syllabus language for accommodations:

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

Michigan State University is committed to providing equal opportunity for participation in all programs, services and activities. Requests for accommodations by persons with disabilities may be made by contacting the Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities online at rcpd.msu.edu. Once your eligibility for an accommodation has been determined, you will be issued a Verified Individual Services Accommodation ("VISA") form. Please present this form to me within the first two weeks of the term.

Commented [ML3]: Below is the university' recommended language on academic integrity. Feel free to include some or all of it, if you'd like!

Commit to Integrity: Academic Honesty

Article 2.3.2 of the [Academic Freedom Report](#) states that "The student shares with the faculty the responsibility for maintaining the integrity of scholarship, grades, and professional standards." In addition, the Department of Community Sustainability adheres to the policies on academic honesty as specified in General Student Regulations 1.0, Protection of Scholarship and Grades; the all-University Policy on Integrity of Scholarship and Grades; and Ordinance 17.00, Examinations. (See [Spartan Life: Student Handbook and Resource Guide](#) and/or the MSU website: www.msu.edu.)

Therefore, unless authorized by your instructor, you are expected to complete all course assignments, including homework, lab work, quizzes, tests and exams, without assistance from any source. You are expected to develop original work for this course; therefore, you may not submit course work you completed for another course to satisfy the requirements for this course. Also, you are not authorized to use the www.allmsu.com Web site to complete any course work in this course. Students who violate MSU academic integrity rules may receive a penalty grade, including a failing grade on the assignment or in the course. Contact your instructor if you are unsure about the appropriateness of your course work. (See also the [Academic Integrity webpage](#).)



enrollees to do likewise. If not, I will abide by university policy and record failing grades for any infraction as well as report this to the proper university authority. For more information, see MSU Regulations, Ordinances and Policies Regarding Academic Honesty and Integrity at: <https://www.msu.edu/unit/ombud/academic-integrity/>. MSU policy on plagiarism can be retrieved at: <https://www.msu.edu/unit/ombud/academicintegrity/plagiarism-policy.html>.



Tentative Topics

Part 1. Food and Culture

Week 1

Monday 1/6/20 - Introduction and Overview

Today we introduce the subject of the class - What are food fights?

Recommended:

- Video: Eating anxiety: The perils of food politics and policy making
- [Chad Lavin](https://vtechworks.lib.vt.edu/handle/10919/51577) - <https://vtechworks.lib.vt.edu/handle/10919/51577>

Wednesday 1/8/20 - Food and Meaning

Today we think about what food means to us.

- Counihan, Carole. 1992. "Food Rules in the United States." *Anthropological Quarterly* 65(2):55-66.
- Williams, Raymond. 1988. "Culture" pp 87-93. In *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*. London: Fontana.
- Video: Nashville and the Civil Rights Era (Southern Foodways Alliance): <https://www.southernfoodways.org/nashville-hbcus-and-civil-rights-activism/>

Recommended:

- Gillette, Maris Boyd. 2005. "Children's Food and Islamic Dietary Restrictions in Xi'an, reprinted as Ch. 7 in *The Cultural Politics of Food and Eating*, James Watson and Melissa Caldwell, eds. (Blackwell), p. 106-121.

Week 2

Monday 1/13/20 - Food, culture, and identity

Today we examine the power food can have over the individual.

- Gabaccia, Donna. "What Do We Eat?" Ch 4 in *Food in the USA: A Reader*, Carole M. Counihan, ed. New York: Routledge.



- de Silva, “In Memory’s Kitchen: A Legacy From the Women of Terezin,” Forward and Ch. 1
- Film: *The Meaning of Food: Last Meals*

Wednesday 1/15/20

Today we explore what went into making of the food system we take for granted.

- Beardsworth, Alan and Teresa Keil. 1997. “The Making of the Modern Food System.” Pp 32-46 in *Sociology on the Menu*, Alan Beardsworth and Teresa Keil, eds. London: Routledge.

Recommended:

- Mintz, Sidney. 1996. “Food and its Relationship to Concepts of Power.” *In Tasting Food, Tasting Freedom: Excursions into Eating, Culture, and the Past*. Boston: Beacon Press. Pp. 17-32.

Part 2: Food and Power

Week 3

Monday 1/20/20 – Martin Luther King Day – no class meeting

Wednesday 1/22/20 What is food politics?

Today we consider how food is politicized.

- Herring, Ronald. 2015. “How is Food Political?: Market, State and Knowledge.” Pp 3-43 in *Oxford Handbook of Food, Politics and Society*. Oxford University Press.

Recommended:

- Lukes, Steven. 2005. *Power; A Radical View*. Ch. 1
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 2001. “Cultural Power” Pp 69-76 in *Cultural Sociology*, edited by Lyn Spillman.

Week 4

Monday 1/27/20 - Economic Power

Guest Speaker Dr. Phil Howard



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Today we think about who owns what in the food system and why this matters.

- Howard, Phillip H. 2016. *Concentration and Power in the Food System: Who Controls What We Eat?* Pp 1-49. Bloomsbury Press.

Wednesday 1/29/20 - Constructing Food as a Social Problem

Today we explore how to think about food systems as a problem.

- Loeske, Donileen R. 2008. *Thinking about Social Problems*, 2nd Edition. Pp. 3-48. Aldine Transaction.

Recommended:

- Johnson, Allan G. 1997. "The Forest, the Trees and the One Thing." Pp. 7-35 in *The Forest and the Trees: Sociology as Life, Practice and Promise*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.

Part 3: Food, Agriculture, and Power in the U.S.

Week 5

Monday 2/3/20 - Food Wars

Today we examine the history of food wars; how we got to where we are.

- Lang, Tim and Michael Heasman. 2004. "The Food Wars Thesis." Pp 2-57 (Ch 2) in *Food Wars: The Global Battle for Mouths, Minds and Markets*. (2nd Edt.) Earthscan.

Wednesday 2/5/20 - Food Wars

- Aaron Bobrow-Strain. 2007. "Kills a Body Twelve Ways: Bread Fear and the Politics of 'What to Eat?'" *Gastronomica* 7(3): 45-52.

Week 6

Monday 2/10/20 - The Role of Governments in Food & Agriculture: Policy Making

Today we explore the role of government in our eating practices.

- Effland, Anne. 2000. "U.S. Farm Policy: The First 200 Years"
- National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition blog, [2014 Farm Bill Drill Down: The Bill by the Numbers \(Links to an external site.\)](#)



- Video: Roni Neff (2014), "US Farm Bill History" Food and Farm Policy, from Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health's Center for a Livable Future:

Recommended:

- National Young Farmers Association blog, [2014 Farm Bill Passes Final Hurdle, Signed into Law \(Links to an external site.\)](#)
- Rural Advancement Foundation International, [The 2014 Farm Bill \(Links to external site\)](#)

Wednesday 2/12/20 - The Politics of Farm Subsidies

- Paarlberg, Robert. Food Politics, Chapter 8.
- Marc Bellemare, 2013, "In an Industrialized America, Why Do Members of Congress Support Farm Subsidies?"
http://www.scholarsstrategynetwork.org/sites/default/files/ssn_key_findings_bellemare_on_congress_support_of_agricultural_protection.pdf

Recommended:

- Video: Michael Pollan, [The Farm Bill \(Links to an external site.\):](#)

Week 7

Monday 2/17/20 - Nutrition and Health Policy

Today we explore the role of the food industry in shaping our diets.

- Nestle, Marion. 2013. "Food Politics: How the Food Industry Influences Nutrition and Health," Pp. 1-50. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Wednesday 2/19/20 - Nutrition and Health Policy

- Nestle, Marion. 2013. "Food Politics: How the Food Industry Influences Nutrition and Health," Pp. 51-94. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Week 8

Monday 2/24/20 - Nutrition and Health Policy

- Nestle, Marion. 2013. "Food Politics: How the Food Industry Influences Nutrition and Health" Pp 95-158. Berkeley: University of California Press.



Wednesday 2/26/20 - Food Politics and Lent

Today we look at the role of Michigan culture and its ability to shape foodways.

- Borja, Melissa. 2019. "Muskrat Feasts and the Food Politics of Lent"

Week 9 March 2-6 – Spring Break – no class meeting

Week 10

Monday 3/9/20 - Nutrition and Health Policy

- Nestle, Marion. 2013. "Food Politics: How the Food Industry Influences Nutrition and Health" Pp. 158-196. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Wednesday 3/11/20 - Nutrition and Health Policy

- Nestle, Marion. 2013. "Food Politics: How the Food Industry Influences Nutrition and Health" Pp. 197-218. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Week 11

Monday 3/16/20 - Food Politics in Michigan

Today we consider how politics shapes food policy in Michigan

Guest Speaker, Lori Yelton, MDARD

Wednesday 3/18/20 - Politics in the School Cafeteria

Today we examine how school lunch is shaped by politics at the national and local level.

- Levine, Susan. 2008. *School Lunch Politics: The Surprising History of America's favorite Welfare Program*. Introduction and Ch 1 – 2. Princeton University Press.

Week 12

Monday 3/23/20

- Levine, Susan. 2008. *School Lunch Politics: The Surprising History of America's favorite Welfare Program*. Ch 4. Princeton University Press.



Recommended:

- Confessore, Nicholas. 2014. "How School Lunch Became the Latest Political Battleground", NYT Magazine
- Siegal, Bettina Elias. 2014. "State of the Tray: Will Recent Improvements in School Food Be Rolled Back?" **Civil Eats** blog, <http://civileats.com/2014/02/18/state-of-the-tray-will-recent-improvements-in-school-food-be-rolled-back/> (Links to an external site.)

Wednesday 3/25/20 - Michigan School Lunch Politics

Guest Speaker: Colleen Matts

Today we explore school lunch politics in Michigan and efforts to change it.

- Levine, Susan. 2008. *School Lunch Politics: The Surprising History of America's favorite Welfare Program*. Ch 5. Princeton University Press.

Recommended:

- Poppendieck, Janet. 2010. *Free for All: Fixing School Food in America*, 1st ed., University of California Press.

Week 13

Monday 3/30/20 - French Food Politics

Today we explore how people battle over a classic French culinary symbol.

- DeSoucey, Michaela. 2016. "Contested Tastes: Foie Gras and the Politics of Food"

Wednesday 4/1/20 - Water Wars

Guest Lecturer: Garrett Sieloff

Today we explore the politics of water.

- Gleick, Peter H. 2010. "The War on Tap Water." and "Fear of the Tap". Pp. 1-31 in *Bottled and Sold: The Story Behind our Obsession with Bottled Water*.

Recommended:

- Andrea S. Wile. 2004. "Drink Milk for Fitness": The Cultural Politics of Human Biological Variation and Milk Consumption in the United States. *American Anthropologist* 106(3): 506-517.



Week 14

Monday 4/6/20 - Alternative Food Politics

Today we examine the political side of food labels.

- Clough, Emily. 2015. "The Politics of Food Labeling and Certification." Pp 615-644 in Oxford Handbook of Food, Politics and Society. *Oxford University Press*.

Recommended:

- Hinrichs, C. Clare. 2000. "Embeddedness and Local Food Systems: Notes on Two Types of Direct Agricultural Market." *Journal of Rural Studies*. 16: 295-303
- Mark Engler. 2012. "Hijacked Organic, Limited Local, Faulty Fair Trade: What's a Radical to Eat?" *Dissent*. 59(2): 20-25. <http://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/hijacked-organic-limited-local-faultyfair-trade>

Wednesday 4/8/20 - Alternative Food Politics

Today we consider the politics of food system change.

- Myers, B.R. 2011. "The moral crusade against foodies: Gluttony dressed up as foodie-ism is still gluttony." *The Atlantic*. March pp 1-7.

Recommended:

- William Roseberry. 1996. "The Rise of Yuppie Coffees and the Reimagination of Class in the United States." *American Anthropologist* 98(4): 762-775.

Week 15

Monday 4/13/20

Today we discuss the politics of the farmers' market.

- Alkon, Alison Hope. 2012. "Going Green, Growing Green" and "Farmers' Markets, Race, and the Green Economy." Pp. 1-15 and pp. 143-154 in *Black, White and Green: Farmers' Markets, Race, and the Green Economy*. Athens: University of Georgia Press.

Wednesday 4/15/20

Visit to Farm Market – class will meet at 4 pm for a visit to Allen Farmers' Market at the Allen Neighborhood Center, 1611 E. Kalamazoo St., Lansing.



Week 16

Monday 4/20/20 - Food Activism

Today we examine how you can be a part of effective food system change.

- Mary Summers. 2013. "Voting with More than your Fork: Reclaiming Food Citizenship"

Recommended:

- Lang, Tim and Michael Heasman. 2004. "Food democracy or food control" Pp 253-278

Wednesday 4/22/20 - Student Choice Day

What do you want to discuss? On this day we will explore a topic democratically decided upon by the class.

Final Exam: Monday, April 27, 12:45-2:45 p.m. (306 Natural Resources)

