

Food & Farming in the U.S.

Tues & Thurs, 9:40-11:10 am in Theater 002
Macalester College | Fall 2022

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Drop-in hours: Tues & Thurs 11:15am-12:15pm in Olin-Rice 248 (or by appt)

Eating is an agricultural act.
– Wendell Berry



Course Description

Food and farming systems are inextricably linked with the political, economic, social, and ecological structures in the US. A bite of an apple is directly connected to the climate and soil where the orchard grew; the wild and domesticated bees that pollinated the flower; the people who pruned the apple tree, managed the pests, and picked the apple; the people and machines that washed, sorted, packed, stored, and transported it; and the businesses that may have bought and sold the apple until it reached you; and the circumstances that made it possible for you to purchase, store, prepare, and eventually eat the apple, and dispose of the waste. Going deeper, that apple is also connected to historical questions of land ownership, labor and immigration policies, science and technology, plant breeding, cuisine and dietary advice, global apple markets, and so on. In this course, we will grapple with this complexity by examining some key shifts in American food & farm history. Starting with indigenous foodways prior to colonization and ending with contemporary food movements, we will make several stops in between to look at colonial agriculture, shifts caused by industrialization, and the cultural politics of eating.

Throughout, we will examine three overarching themes:

- **Complexity in Systems:** How do farming, food systems, and the environment mutually shape one-another? What are the key points of interconnection?
- **Social Inequality:** How are food/farm systems enmeshed with social hierarchies based on gender, race, class, and other identities?
- **Change and Persistence:** How have the dynamics of food/farm systems changed or persisted over time? In what ways does the past shape current conditions and possibilities for the future?

Course Policies & Approaches to Learning

Health & Wellbeing

Nothing is more important than your health. If you do not feel well, are exhibiting any symptoms of COVID-19 or other infectious disease, or are worried that you might be contagious, please do not come to class. It is far more prudent to rest, heal, and return when you are ready. This will also help protect the health of the community as a whole. If you are unable to attend, let me know and we can discuss resources and ways to make-up lost class time.

In accordance with Macalester's Face Coverings policy, we will wear high-quality masks indoors for at least 2 weeks. If Macalester drops the mandate after that, we will come to a consensus as a class whether we will continue to mask indoors.

If you are feeling perpetually low, remember we have gone through and are going through a severe collective trauma. It will have a significant, long-term effect on mental health. And each person might be experiencing their own compounding stressors—financial, physical, emotional, or otherwise. If you are having difficulties, please don't hesitate to contact me and/or find support from the [Hamre Center](#). These [resources](#) may also be helpful.

Active Learning & Co-Creation

Class sessions will involve a mix of lecture and active learning strategies. You will be asked to participate and contribute to the learning process through a variety of individual and small group activities that involve writing, talking, problem solving, reflection, and teaching and learning from each other. I take that last part seriously— you will have many opportunities to share your knowledge, perspectives, and skills to enrich the class. This can feel uncomfortable if you are used to an instructional model that views teachers as transmitters of expert knowledge and students as passive recipients. Despite the potential discomfort, research indicates that active learning techniques lead to improved critical thinking and interpersonal skills as well as increased retention and transfer of information.

Attendance & Engagement

You are invited and expected to attend and engage in class regularly. Engagement includes:

- Preparation: reviewing the material before class
- Focus: avoid distractions during class
- Presences: engaged and responsive during group activities
- Asking questions: in class and out of class
- Listening: hearing what others say. Also, what they're not saying.
- Specificity: referring to specific ideas from readings and discussions
- Synthesizing: making connections between readings, discussions, current events, and/or your experience (Credit to Dr. Mark Sample)

If you are unable to attend because of illness, COVID exposure, school-related travel, care-taking responsibilities, or other circumstances, communication is key. Please give me advance notice whenever possible. We can make a plan together for making up in-class work depending on the circumstances. Typically, it will involve reviewing the slides and class notes and completing a supplemental activity, but it may vary.

Diversity and Conviviality

Bringing your diverse viewpoints, experiences, and approaches to learning to the class will make for a better class for everyone. When we're dealing with difficult or controversial subject matter, we will strive for a free exchange of ideas while being mindful of the ways that our identities are bound up in social hierarchies and power dynamics in the wider world. Together as a class, we will develop ground rules to help guide us as we address challenging material head on, and in ways that both encourage difference of opinion and honor each person's full humanity. This course should be a place where it is okay to take

intellectual risks and make mistakes. It is also okay to call attention to it when members of the class (including me) make mistakes. When we do so, I ask that we try to practice “calling in”--rather than “calling out”--with the aim of moving forward together.

Accessibility & Accommodations

I am committed to cultivating an inclusive learning environment and ensuring access to course content for all students, including those with disabilities. If you have a disability, please meet with me early in the semester to discuss your accommodation plan. If you have not yet obtained a plan or want more information, contact Disability Services: disabilityservices@macalester.edu, or call 651-696-6275.

Academic Integrity

You are expected to maintain the highest standards of honesty in your college work. Forgery, cheating, and plagiarism are all serious issues. Plagiarism can be intentional (i.e., knowingly submitting someone else’s work) or unintentional (citing information incorrectly or incompletely). Good news: both of these are avoidable! If you have any questions about effective paraphrasing, when/how to cite sources, or anything else, please ask. There are also excellent resources at the library and the MAX Center.

Flexibility & Grace

We should expect and prepare for some unpredictability this semester. This syllabus—most especially the schedule—represents Plan A. I ask for your patience and understanding if and when we have to make changes on the fly and go with Plan B (C, D, etc.). I commit to extending the same grace to you.

Required Texts & Material

All required material will be available digitally via Moodle. We will primarily read journal articles and book excerpts, but ‘texts’ may also include news articles, podcasts, video clips, and other popular media. Pro-tip: As you read (or watch/listen), it’s a good idea to take notes on the author’s key arguments, supporting points, anything that is confusing, or anything you disagree with. These will help you prepare for class discussions, the reading responses, and any quizzes.

Overview of Assignments

(See Moodle for full descriptions)

Readings Responses

You will post brief *Reading Responses* 10 times throughout the semester. That works out to nearly 1 per week. Each should be ~300-400 words and be posted to the Moodle forum by NOON on the day *before* we discuss the reading in class.

Activities

We’ll do an activity nearly every day in class, usually a reflection on or extension of the readings, lecture, or discussion. It may include a quiz where you can use your notes, but not the readings themselves. Sometimes you will complete activities individually, sometimes in a small group. Unless otherwise noted, these are due by 5pm on the day of the class. Often, you’ll be able to complete them in class but some may require some additional work outside of class.

Colleague Points

Successful learning depends on a sense of community and collegiality within our classroom and beyond. You are invited and expected to complete 10 ‘colleague points’ (nearly 1 per week). Things that qualify include:

- Take class notes to share
- Email an author of a reading
- Drive a vehicle for a field trip
- Provide mutual aid to a classmate
- Complete a recommended reading and share with the class
- Attend a food/ag-related event and report back
- Write an “advice to future students” letter on the last day of class

This is not an exhaustive list; you can propose additional activities. Many can be done more than once. You are expected to keep track of your colleague points. (Inspired by Dr. Max Liboiron)

Reflections

At the beginning, middle, and end of the semester, I will ask you to reflect on the course, your expectations, your learning goals and progress towards these.

Food in the News Essays

The Food in the News essays asks you to critically engage with news and reflect on connections between the course content and recent news. You will be asked to complete a total of 2 (specs graded), with the option of submitting a 3rd if one does not meet the requirements. These are to be ~2 pages, single-spaced.

Unessay Assignments

This is a chance to follow your interests and creativity. Over the first few weeks, think about a topic that is relevant to the course and is of interest to you. Your topic could fall into the category ‘I can’t believe this wasn’t on the syllabus’ or it could be a deeper dive into something we already touched on. Next, think about how you will present it. You could choose to write a few songs, make a website, curate a mini-museum exhibit, create a comic strip, write an op-ed or policy memo, create a painting, or write a traditional research paper. Think of the research, thought, and effort that goes into this as equivalent to a 7-8 page research paper. A series of smaller assignments will lead up to the final Unessay. (Assignment inspired by Hayley Brazier, Heidi Kaufman, Marc Kissel)

- Topic proposal and learning goals: brief description of your proposed topic and 3 learning goals
- Preliminary source list + next steps: list 10 sources, including annotations for 4. Outline a timeline of the next steps to move your project forward.
- Workshop: share an early in-progress version to exchange feedback and inspiration in class
- Draft: a full draft version + self-assessment.
- Final + statement: revised Unessay + 1-page statement discussing what you did, why, and how + a self-assessment

Grading and Assessment

This course will use alternatives to traditional grading schemes. Nearly all assignments will be ‘specs’ graded, meaning if you complete the assignment satisfactorily according to the specifications in the assignment description, you will receive full credit. Essentially, it’s pass/fail with verbal and written feedback. For Food in the News essays, you’ll have the opportunity to try again if the first submission is not satisfactory.

The draft and final Unessay will be co-graded. Beyond a few basic goals that I have identified for the project, I will ask you to identify 3 of your own goals. After completing the draft and final versions, you will reflect on the progress you made towards these. If you assign yourself a grade that is drastically low

or high, I reserve the right to adjust the grade—thus the term ‘co-grading.’ (Credit to Dr. Britt Abel for this language.)

Why specs and co-grading? These approaches emphasize intrinsic rewards (learning) over extrinsic reward (grade) and center students' own goals in the learning process. This system of grading might be new for some of you. Please know that this is also an invitation to discuss grading and assessment. There are few points in the semester where I will formally ask you to reflect on the course and how it’s going for you, but please come to me at any point with questions or concerns (or moments of excitement!)

ASSIGNMENT	HOW MANY?	ASSESSMENT	% OF FINAL GRADE
Reading responses	10 (~1/wk)	Specs	15%
Activities	22 (~2/wk)	Specs	22%
Colleague points	10 (~1/wk)	Specs	10%
Reflections	3	Specs	3%
Food in the News essays*	2*	Specs	12%
Unessay			38%
Topic + goals	1	Specs	(3%)
Sources + plan	1	Specs	(5%)
Draft	1	Co-grading	(15%)
Final	1	Co-grading	(15%)
*Food in the News essays can be resubmitted			

Late Assignments

Reading reflections and in-class activities must be turned in on time to earn credit because they help me prepare for the next class session. If you miss one, just be sure to do the next one. For most other assignments, there is an automatic 24-hr grace period, meaning if you turn the assignment in within 24-hrs of the due date/time, that will be considered on-time. If unavoidable circumstances arise (like illness, school-related travel, etc.), I can work with you to make alternative arrangements. Please write me an email with (a) the assignment, (b) the proposed date when you believe you can finish it, and (c) if you are comfortable, the reason for the requested extension.

Electronic Devices in Class

Research suggests taking notes by hand is better for learning. If you do use a laptop or tablet in class, please be mindful of the potential for these devices to be a distraction for yourself, other students, and me. It’s more noticeable than you think when students use devices for things that aren’t related to the course. If an electronic device is detracting from the learning environment, I will ask you to put it away.

Getting in Touch

Talking with students is one of my favorite parts of teaching! I’m happy to meet with you about the course or just to chat. Stop by drop-in hours after class in Olin-Rice 249 or set up a zoom by emailing me with a few possible day/times. When it comes to email, I do my best to reply within 1-2 business days (no guarantees over weekends).

Additional Resources

- [DeWitt Wallace Library](#): Librarians are heroes. Truly.
- [MAX Center tutoring](#): This is an incredible resource for students of all levels. Take advantage of it!
- [Disability Services](#): They facilitate access, accommodations, and inclusive programming.

- [Mental Health and Wellness](#): Mental health challenges are incredibly common. If you are struggling, please reach out. There are a variety of resources that provide different levels of support on and off campus.
- [Sexual Misconduct Prevention and Support](#): Macalester is committed to providing a safe and open learning and living environment for all. Please be aware that as a faculty member, I have a duty to report disclosures of sexual misconduct or harrament to the Title IX office so that they can offer resources. It will always be your decision what resources to use depending on your situation. There are also a number of confidential support resources on campus.

Course Schedule (Tentative)

See Moodle for assigned readings and any changes.

Week 1: Sept 1

Thurs: Getting to know each other, the topic, the course

**Submit: Reflection #1 (by 9/2, 5pm)*

Week 2: Sep 6, 8

Tues: Preparing the soil & setting the table

Thurs: Indigenous foodways

Week 3: Sept 13, 15

Tues: Colonial New England

Thurs: The Plantation and its reverberations

Week 4: Sept 20, 22

Tues: Eating and Empire

**Submit: Food in the News #1 (by 9/20, 5pm)*

Thurs: Urbanization and Food

Week 5: Sept 27 and **30**

Tues: Urban garden movements

Thurs: No class - Friday field trip instead

Fri: Field trip to Dream of Wild Health until mid afternoon

**Submit: Unessay proposal*

Week 6: Oct 4, 6

Tues: Industrialization in agriculture

Thurs: Industrialization in agriculture (continued)

**Submit: Reflection #2 (by 10/6, by 5pm)*

Week 7: Oct 11, 13:

Tues: Crop Breeding

**Submit: Food in the News #2 (by Tues, 10/11, 5pm)*

Thurs: Industrializing distribution, processing

Week 8: Oct 18

Tues: Guest lecture by Chef Gustavo Romero

**Submit: Source list + next steps* (by Wed 10/19, 5pm)

**Submit: Colleague points, mid-way* (by Wed 10/19, 5pm)

Thurs: NO CLASS [fall break]

Week 9: Oct 25, 27:

Tues: Race, exploitation, resistance post-War

Thurs: Alternative food movements

Week 10: Nov 1, 3: Alternative food movements

Tues: Alternative food movements [Election Day]

Thurs: *Unessay Workshop*

Week 11: Nov 8, 10: Promise and peril of reforms

Tues: Implications for gender, race, class

Thurs: Gentrification

Week 12: Nov 15, 17

Tue: Topic TBD by students

Thurs: Topic TBD by students

Week 13: Nov 22

Tues: Urban agriculture in Mpls

**Submit Draft Unessay* (by Wed 11/23, 5pm)

Thurs: no class [Thanksgiving]

Week 14: Nov 29, Dec 1:

Tue: TBD by students

Thurs: TBD by students

Week 15: Dec 6, 8: Taking stock

Tues: Share *Unessays*

Thurs: Class wrap up

**Submit Final Unessay* (by Fri 12/9, 5pm)

**Submit Colleague Points, full* (by Fri 12/9, 5pm)

**Submit Reflection #3* (by Fri 12/9, 5pm)