

International Agribusiness Studies

(Spring/Summer 2021)

Overview and Purpose of the Course:

In the previous two years, this course provided a comprehensive analysis of social, economic, political, cultural and environmental issues surrounding specific agricultural products along the agri-food value chains (a flow of the food from upstream to downstream). Keeping in mind what we have learned, this year we turn our attention to one of the ongoing structural processes with profound influences on agri-food systems and rural economies around the world: financialization. We are going to read together a book on the topic that critically examines the concept of financialization and how food and farming are being financialized; the impacts of financialization in the food industry and in farming and forestry; as well as the impacts on rural people and communities.

Course Goals:

Through this course, students can acquire critical insights into the process of financialization that has touched upon all sectors of the global economy, but agri-food in a specific and profound way: how globalization and neoliberalism have played their role in the process, how the state's actions have promoted (or restricted) the process, and if and how the actions of people (resistance and contestation) could shape the course of financialization with a positive development outcome.

Detailed Schedule:

We are going to read the following book (tentatively):

Hilde Bjorkhaug, André Magnan, Geoffrey Lawrence (eds) *The Financialization of Agri-Food Systems: Contested Transformations*. Routledge, 2018.

Week 1) Introduction: The Financialization of Agri-food

Week 2-3) The Concept of 'Financialization': Criticisms and Insights / Profit, Aid and Ethics in Public Financialization

Week 4-5) The Emergence of Sovereign Wealth Funds in the Global Food System / A Global Analysis of Assetization

Week 6-7) Media and Public Discourses around Farmland Investment in Canada and Australia / Finance, Food and Political Tumult in Egypt

Week 8-9) The Role of Sogo-shosha in Global Soy Investment / Poultry Grabs and Agri-food Financialization: The Case of JBS of Brazil

Week 10-11) Between Cooperative and Private Equity Capital in the Norwegian Food Sector / The Local Histories of Agri-food Financialization in Saskatchewan, Canada

Week 12-13) Canadian Supply Management as a Bulwark against Financialization / The Local Counterparts of Financialization

Week 14-15) Financialization and the Swedish Land Acquisition Act / Institutional Investment in a Multi-functional Forested Landscape: Neoliberalism and Pragmatism in Contemporary Land conservation

Week 16) Wrap-up and feedback

International Political Economy of Agriculture

(Autumn/Winter semester, 2021)

Course Objectives and Goals:

This course provides a comprehensive and critical view on the development and current status of agriculture and food governance at the global, national and local levels by referring to various theoretical frameworks and concepts of international political economy and agri-food sociology, especially with a focus on the unequal relationship between various actors. We will discuss issues and prospects of agriculture and food governance from the perspectives of concepts, discourses and movements over “sustainable development” and “food sovereignty”.

Through this course, students will acquire critical and interdisciplinary approaches to social, economic, political, cultural, and environmental issues surrounding agriculture and food, and gain insight into fundamental social science issues such as “structure and agency” and “discursive power”.

Detailed Schedule:

This course consists of 8 classes (on alternate Mondays), each of which is held from 13:30 till about 16:30. All classes in this semester will be held online.

#1: October 4 (till 15:00), #2: October 11, #3: October 25, #4: November 8, #5: November 22, #6: December 6, #7: December 20, #8: January 4*, #9: January 24 (till 15:00) *extra-class day

#1 (10/4) Guidance

Every year, textbooks used in this course are different, but we use introductory books with high international recognition as textbooks so that even beginners of agri-food studies or international political economy and sociology can learn effectively. Because of this, the outline of what we have learned in the previous years will be provided at the beginning of this first class so that all the participants can share the overarching aims and themes, as well as disciplinary background of the course. In this semester, we are going to read the following textbook together:

Jose Louis Vivero-Pol, Tomaso Ferrando, Olivier De Schutter, and Ugo Mttei, eds., *Routledge Handbook of Food as a Commons*, Routledge, 2020.

Chapter 1. Introduction: The food commons are coming...

- In the first class, the outline of the first, introductory chapter, including the structure of the whole book, will be briefly introduced, then each of the participating students will be assigned to of which chapter s/he is going to prepare an analytical summary (see below) and present in the following classes.

#2 (10/11)

Chapter 2. The idea of food as a commons: multiple understandings for multiple dimensions of food

- It is not enough to say that food is not a commodity, but it is essential to discuss its role as life enabler, natural resource, human rights, cultural determinant, tradeable good and public good --- all these dimensions must be taken into consideration.

Chapter 3. The food system as a commons

- It is not enough to focus on food as the product of the food system. The de-commodifying power of the commons must redesign the entirety of the food system, and as such redefine each single element of the system: e.g. land, seeds, gender, energy, labour, landscape, the convivial act of eating, food waste, and all other components of the food system must be re-thought, re-imagined, and practiced according to the radical and ecological paradigm of commoning and the commons.

#3 (10/25)

Chapter 4. Growing a care-based commons food regime

- Enrich the idea of food system as a commons with insights from critical feminism and non-Western traditions: a holistic, interconnected and intersectional idea of care as the core of growing a commons food regime

Chapter 6. Food security as a global public good

- An innovative understanding of food as a commons must be accompanied by an innovative understanding of food security as a public good.

#4 (11/8)

Chapter 8. Community-based commons and rights systems

- Community-based food systems with the notion of food as a commons → benefits can be derived if we organize communities in ways that facilitate positive social interaction, minimize exploitation and indifferences, and encourage caring for the others. The food system is not a terrarium that can be objectified and studied, but rather a complex set of socio-ecological relations in flux that shapes communities and the space around them, at the same time that it is shaped by these communities.

Chapter 10. Food as a commodity

- A genealogy of the idea of food as a commodity --- It is only by knowing the premises and processes that shaped the narrative behind the dominant food regime that alternative imaginations and new forms of resistance can be organized.

#5 (11/22)

Chapter 11. Traditional agricultural knowledge as a commons

- Traditional agricultural knowledge, or knowledge commons, illustrate the political construction of commons, not just an intellectual exercise but a political stand against the commodification of knowledge.

Chapter 12. Scientific knowledge of food and agriculture in public institutions

- Challenges the ongoing privatization of food and agriculture scientific knowledge. Shifts in public policies and investment can build on the models of knowledge commons to allow scientific knowledge of food and agriculture to be recognized and governed as a global public good.

#6 (12/6)

Chapter 13. Western gastronomy, inherited commons and market logic: cooking up a crisis

- The combination between gastronomy and commodification makes contemporary highly marketed gastronomy anything but democratic. It is time to imagine a new pathway for multiple gastronomies that breaks with joint market-elitist gastronomy and recognize the popular, open-knowledge and shared bases of gastronomy and cuisine.

Chapter 14. Genetic resources for food and agriculture as commons

- The possibility of governing plant and animal genetic resources for food and agriculture as commons → innovative legal frameworks and governance arrangements inspired by the philosophy of the commons...

#7 (12/20)

Chapter 17. The commoning of food governance in Canada: pathways towards a national food policy?

- Networks and coalitions of civil society organizations are actively working towards integrating values of food as a commons and a public good, with a focus on strengthening their role in food governance in the case of Canada. There are the opportunities and tensions that emerge when a polycentric and self-organized commons-based governance is combined with the role of public authorities as facilitators.

18. Food surplus as charitable provision: obstacles to re-introducing food as a commons

- The implications and hurdles that charitable food provisioning may interpose to the transition towards a commons-based food system in the case of Ireland. Highlight the intrinsic inequality and unsustainability that characterize a system based on excesses and volatile solutions to hunger, using the left-overs of an industrialized food system.

#8 (1/4)

Chapter 20. Can food as a commons advance food sovereignty?

- The question of whether food as a commons can advance food sovereignty... Noted both concepts are highly complicated on the ground.

Chapter 22. The centrality of food for social emancipation: civic food networks as real utopias projects

- The potential and limits of local food systems. Localism can help with transitioning towards a more equitable, ethical and sustainable agro-food system. However, the idea of localism can also support protectionism and neo-ruralist ideologies that reinforce bounded, defensive and spatial strategies. A true emancipation can only take place when food ceases to be perceived as a commodity and is understood in its multi-dimensional value. Food as a commons plays a crucial political role in the construction of a real utopian project to achieve an aspirational and inspirational fair and sustainable food system.

#9 (1/24) - Wrap-up and feedback

Reading the conclusion chapter, we will wrap up the course by letting the students share what they will have learned and giving comments to each other's statements.

Chapter 24. Food as commons: towards a new relationship between the public, the civic and the private

Basic Rules

- One is assigned to prepare a summary presentation of each book chapter, including questions, reflections and some points for discussion (see Analytical Summary)
- Summary part of the presentation should not be detailed too much
- Handout (a summary, questions and discussion points) needs to be circulated via email 2-3 days beforehand
- A student who will be assigned for the next after the class is appointed to be a facilitator, who introduces presentation, manage time, collects and organises questions and points for discussion, and facilitates discussion
- All the participants are required to actively join the discussion
- Anybody can present anything additional but closely relevant to the chapter(s) with or without a handout
- Unless there is any problem with internet connections, all participants are required to turn on their own camera (but mute their microphone except when speaking)

Analytical Summary:

- **Summary** --- identify and summarise the key arguments or main points of the assigned reading(s). Not descriptive, but analytical. Not exhaustive, but picking out important key arguments or main points, and briefly explain them. Also, in some cases, outlining the structure (the logic of author's argument), without detailing the content, is important.
- **Integration** --- pick one or two ways in which the authors' arguments or the topics of the assigned readings relate to one another or relate to something that has been ever studied by the students or also to the reality of their own country or region. Look for similarity or difference, and generate connections, contrasts or comparisons between them.
- **Question/Reactions** --- identify questions that we could discuss in the class. Also, students can raise specific questions about which parts of the reading did not make sense. Possible to raise objections (to content, style, politics, methods, etc), argument, praise, or any other reactions the students have while reading.