

Earth Institute Executive Education Program in Conservation & Environmental Sustainability (EICES)

The World on Your Plate: Food, Equity & Sustainability

Instructor: Mia MacDonald

Course ID: ENVB 0408 N / Call number: 70945

Mondays 6:10 – 8:10 PM

Nov. 20, 27, Dec. 4, 11, 18 (Module 3, 5 sessions)

Room: 652 Schermerhorn Extension

Available via Distance Learning

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No grades will be given, but students must attend at least three of the five course sessions and complete all assignments to receive course credit. Attendance at all five sessions is, of course, necessary to master the material and obtain a good reference (if needed), from the Center and/or instructor.

Course Description

This course will provide an overview of the multiple and varied intersections among environmental and social factors involved in food production and consumption. The broad challenge and opportunity of sustainability require a multifaceted approach. The course is about policy: its development as well as implementation. It will, however, also explore the roles of public understanding and collective and individual action in informing policies and changing practices.

Among the topics that will be covered are the relationships of food and agriculture to climate change, land use change, water use, and biodiversity, as well as human health and well-being. The course will also investigate the ethical questions food systems pose as natural resources come under growing pressure from global warming, rising human populations, and the internationalization of Western consumer lifestyles along with methods of food production and ways of eating.

A focus of the course will be animal agriculture and the effects on prospects for sustainability and equity of rising global consumption and production of meat, dairy and other animal products. This important but often neglected set of issues has recently begun to receive increased attention in U.S. and global policy arenas, public discussions and the media. Animal agriculture in a global context is also a particular area of interest for and expertise of the instructor and the non-profit policy action tank she runs, Brighter Green (brightergreen.org).

The course will be global in outlook, with case and thematic examples drawn from the broad swath of the world known as the global South, including China, Brazil, India, and East Africa. U.S. food systems, which provide a “model” for much of the world, and debates about food and sustainability in the U.S., will be explored. So will urban agriculture and its role in accelerating sustainable food systems. Venues and processes for shifting food and agricultural policy in a more sustainable direction will be discussed, including the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC); the sustainable development goals (SDGs); expert commissions and working groups on food, agriculture and climate change/natural resources; and national diet and nutrition guidelines. Course readings will reflect these as well.

Through the course, students will develop knowledge and skills to identify creative, ambitious and practical approaches to fostering more sustainable, equitable and humane food systems. They will also learn about

policy processes and entry points. Students will be encouraged to view their own plates and ideas about food and the environment as both a source of information and a starting point for policy action. Course readings include scientific papers, civil society-produced research, education/advocacy materials, and media reports; documentary film and videos are also featured in the syllabus materials.

Assignments:

1. In weeks 1–5, one or two students will be asked to circulate before class an article about food and sustainability that drew their attention and then lead a short discussion about the issues it covers, why it's of interest/relevance to the course and to them, and the conclusions and/or further questions it led them to.
2. For the final assignment, due in week 5, students will: 1) write a three page, double-spaced paper on a food and sustainability issue that most interests them (covered in class or not), and how they would explain its importance to a colleague, a researcher, a journalist, or a policy-maker in a U.S. or international body; or 2) write a short paper (three pages double-spaced maximum) outlining their policy idea and a plan for influencing policy-making in a specific policy arena (or space); or 3) make a short (five-minute) in-class presentation using slides and/or video on written topic 1 or 2. Students completing option 1 or 2 will be asked to give a short summary in class of their paper, but no formal presentation is required.

If students cannot attend class, they should plan to email their assignment before the class session. Please complete the reading for the first class session before the class.

WEEK 1. Introduction: Global plates, how they got to be the way they are, the relevance to sustainability, key environmental and equity issues on the table, and the policy discourse.

Reading (required):

Food Climate Research Network (FCRN), Foodsource (online), Review sections 1–10.
<http://www.foodsource.org.uk/>

Hawkes, Corinna, “We need a food system that works for everyone, and our planet. This is how we can do it,” World Economic Forum, November 22, 2016. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/11/we-need-a-food-system-that-works-for-everyone-and-our-planet/>

MacDonald, Mia, and Anthony Froggatt, “What the Paris Agreement Left Out: A Crucial Path for a Lower Emissions Future,” Huffington Post, January 7, 2016. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/mia-macdonald/what-the-paris-agreement-left-out_b_8897798.html

Additional reading (optional):

Key Findings and Executive Summary, *Changing Climate, Changing Diets: Pathways to Lower Meat Consumption*, London: Chatham House, 2015. <https://www.chathamhouse.org/publication/changing-climate-changing-diets>

Jacobs, Andrew and Matt Richtel, “How Big Business Got Brazil Hooked on Junk Food”, New York Times, September 16, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/09/16/health/brazil-obesity-nestle.html>

WEEK 2. Interconnections and Disconnects: What is a sustainable diet? What role do concepts of “sustainable diets”, national nutrition and diet guidelines, and development policies and priorities have in food and agriculture systems, food security, and the global environment?

Reading (required):

Bankman, Judy “Chronic Disease, Changing Diets, and Sustainability: The Globalization of Western-style Eating and its Implications.” Brighter Green, 2017. http://brightergreen.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/brighter_green_public_health_paper.pdf

Merrigan, Kathleen, *et al.*, “Designing a Sustainable Diet,” *Science*, October 2015. <http://science.sciencemag.org/content/sci/early/2015/09/30/science.aab2031.full.pdf?ijkey=E7jTC7HZzzEpc&keytype=ref&siteid=sci>

Sustainable Development Goals, United Nations, 2015. <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/sustainable-development-goals/>

Additional reading (optional):

FAO and FCRN, *Plates, Pyramids, Planet: Developments in National Healthy and Sustainable Dietary Guidelines: A State of Play Assessment*, March 2016. <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i5640e.pdf>

MacDonald, Mia, “Kenya’s Encounter with Large-Scale Production Agriculture,” *Satya*, December 2015.

WEEK 3. China: The Big One: China is the world’s largest producer and consumer of animal products, including meat; what does this mean for China and the world?

Screening of documentary film “What’s For Dinner?” directed by Jian Yi. Trailers for it and the sequel, “Six Years On”, along with more information about both films, can be found here: <http://wfdinner.com/home/>

Reading (required):

Zhou, Wanging, *The Triangle: The Evolution and Future of Industrial Animal Agriculture in the U.S., China and Brazil*, Brighter Green, 2016. <http://brightergreen.org/the-triangle>

The Chinese Dietary Guidelines (2016): <http://dg.en.cnsoc.org>

Aubrey, Allison, “Can Arnold Schwarzenegger Persuade China to Eat Less Meat?”, National Public Radio, June 24, 2016. <http://www.npr.org/sections/thesalt/2016/06/24/483407108/can-arnold-schwarzenegger-persuade-china-to-eat-less-meat>

Additional reading (optional):

MacDonald, Mia, and Justine Simon, *Skillful Means: The Challenges of China’s Encounter with Factory Farming*, Brighter Green, 2011. <http://brightergreen.org/china>

Kuo, Lily, “The World Eats Cheap Bacon at the Expense of North Carolina’s Rural Poor,” *Quartz*, July 14, 2015. <http://qz.com/433750/the-world-eats-cheap-bacon-at-the-expense-of-north-carolinas-rural-poor/>

WEEK 4. Cities and Sustainable, Climate-friendly, and Fair Food Systems: Urban agriculture is a growing area of interest and action, and more of the world's cities are seeking to incubate fairer, healthier, less resource-intensive, less wasteful, and lower carbon food systems. Are these efforts key to changing local foodscapes and the global food system? What about New York City in particular? What about rural regions?

Reading/viewing (required):

Milan Urban Food Policy Pact, October 15, 2015: <http://www.milanurbanfoodpolicypact.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Milan-Urban-Food-Policy-Pact-EN.pdf>

MacDonald, Mia, "New York to Lead on Food and Climate Policy?", *Civil Eats*, December 23, 2013. <http://civileats.com/2013/12/23/new-york-to-lead-on-food-and-climate-policy-bill-de-blasio-and-the-foodprint-resolution/#sthash.kbQvRRt8.dpuf>

NYC Foodprint Resolution text:

http://www.brightergreen.org/files/nyc_foodprint_resolution.pdf

Maathai, Wangari, "Moving Beyond Subsistence," *The Challenge for Africa*, New York: Pantheon, pp. 11–18.

Additional reading/viewing (optional):

NYC Foodprint Resolution policy and public education documents:

http://www.brightergreen.org/files/nyc_foodprint_policy_doc.pdf

http://www.brightergreen.org/files/nyc_foodprint_outreach_doc.pdf

Read materials articles/view videos on the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact website:

<http://www.milanurbanfoodpolicypact.org/>

Read materials about the C-40 Food Systems Network initiative: http://www.c40.org/networks/food_systems

Guardian Sustainable Business, "Next-gen urban farms: 10 innovative projects from around the world", *Guardian*, July 2, 2014. <https://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/2014/jul/02/next-gen-urban-farms-10-innovative-projects-from-around-the-world>

NYC Food Policy, Food Policy Initiatives:

<http://www1.nyc.gov/site/foodpolicy/initiatives/procurement.page>

Smith, Georgina, "Paving Africa's way towards a sustainable, profitable food future with women at the lead", *CIAT blog*, October 13, 2017.

<http://blog.ciat.cgiar.org/paving-africas-way-towards-a-sustainable-profitable-food-future-with-women-at-the-lead/>

WEEK 5. Toward the Future: Shock? Or Sustainability and Sanity? Presentations. Where do we go from here? What is a sustainable, equitable global plate? The final class will tie the course's themes together and focus on possibilities for policy attention and action. Plus, student presentations.

Reading/viewing (required):

Bajželj, Bojana, *et al.*, "Importance of Food-demand Management for Climate Mitigation," *Nature Climate Change*, August 31, 2014. <https://www.nature.com/nclimate/journal/v4/n10/full/nclimate2353.html>

IPES-Food. Executive Summary: From uniformity to diversity: a paradigm shift from industrial agriculture to diversified agroecological systems. International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food systems, 2016.
http://www.ipes-food.org/images/Reports/UniformityToDiversity_ExecSummary.pdf

Watch 2-3 videos from the EAT Forum, archived here: <http://eatforum.org/archive/#videos>

Additional reading (optional):

“Declaration of the International Forum for Agroecology,” Nyéléni, Mali, February 27, 2015.
<https://viacampesina.org/en/index.php/main-issues-mainmenu-27/sustainable-peasants-agriculture-mainmenu-42/1749-declaration-of-the-international-forum-for-agroecology>

World Bank, “Foster Climate Smart Agriculture,” June 2016.
<http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/agriculture/brief/foster-climate-smart-agriculture>

Civil society statement on “climate-smart agricultural alliance,” September 2015.
<http://www.climatesmartagconcerns.info/cop21-statement.html>