



## GEOG/ERS 361

### Food Systems and Sustainability

Faculty of Environment  
Spring 2019

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**Online course**  
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Office hours: by email/appointment

“Food will be what brings the people together” –The late Secwepemc Elder Wolverine

“Whenever we engage in consumption or production patterns which take more than we need, we are engaging in violence” –Vandana Shiva

“Eat food, not too much, mostly plants” –Michael Pollen

“Eating is a political act” –Wendell Berry

#### **Calendar description**

This course examines dimensions of food systems sustainability and food security, from production to processing to consumption, from local to global scales, in the Global North and South. Specific themes covered in the course include technological and genetic change in food production, resource depletion and wider environmental impacts of the industrial food system, and policy, market-oriented, and civil society initiatives to bring about change in the food system, including organic production and localizing food systems.

#### **Detailed description**

No other human activity has a greater ecological impact than our food system. Socio-cultural, economic, and political dimensions also shape the sustainability and resilience of our food system. How has our food and food system changed over time? What does a sustainable food system or a sustainable diet mean? What actions are individual citizens, NGOs, businesses, and government of various levels taking to shape our food system in a more sustainable and resilient direction? The course modules focus on the linkages between food systems and health, ecosystems, climate and energy, sustainable diets, food environments, the global economy, food localism, labour and justice, food secure cities and regions, fisheries, food movements, circular economies and food waste, food security, food sovereignty, agroecology, and food policy.

Understanding many sides of an issue places you in a stronger position to determine and defend your own ideas. Food system change is a topic fraught with debate, particularly in relation to balancing economic and ecological considerations. Moreover, many policies or initiatives will have significant

impact on 'marginalized' groups. The course develops your familiarity with key debates on sustainable food and food systems.

## Intended learning outcomes

Upon completion of this course, you should be able critically analyze and explain

1. where your food comes from
2. the global and local forces that contribute to existing food systems
3. some key environmental, economic, social, and political challenges to food system sustainability at global and local scales
4. the historical development of the contemporary food system, and associated main concepts and models (e.g., community-based/regional vs. globalized/industrial food systems)
5. some significant policy (state-led), market-oriented, and civil society initiatives to improve food system sustainability

*Weekly learning outcomes:* to be able to highlight...

- **what's wrong?** key environmental, economic, social, and political **challenges** to food system sustainability at global and local scales
- **how do we know?** –some **indicators** of the above
- **how did we get here?** --**historical development** of the contemporary food system, and associated main concepts and models (e.g., community-based/regional vs. globalized/industrial food systems)
- **what's being done?** some significant policy (state-led), market-oriented, and civil society **initiatives** to improve food system sustainability

Module topics

1. **Health, ecosystems, and our food system: we're all in this together**
2. **Food and ecosystems**
3. **Food, climate & energy**
4. **Sustainable diets and healthy food environments**
5. **Global food economy**
6. **Food localism, labour and justice**
7. **Food secure cities and regions**
8. **Indigenous food systems and food sovereignty**
9. **Food from the land and sea**
10. **Enacting change: food movements, food policy, and food justice**
11. **Towards circular economies: food waste and recovery**
12. **Conclusions and food futures**

## Assessment of learning & due dates

Due dates are 11:59pm on the date indicated.

		Due dates
Weekly discussions	20 %	Weekly ('Responders' on Tuesdays; 'Discussants' on Fridays)
- Assignment 1 - Photo set 1	--	May 22
- Assignment 1 - Photo set 2	--	May 29
- Assignment 1 - Photo set 3	--	June 5
Assignment 1: Food diary and reflection	30 %	June 19
Assignment 2: Supply chain of a favourite food	25 %	July 25
Final test (take-home open book, completed over 2 days)	25 %	Aug 7 (questions distributed) Aug 9 exam is due

### Weekly discussion

You will be placed in groups of 4, and then sub-divided further, with 2 people as 'Fruit' and 2 people as 'Vegetables'. In alternate weeks, Fruits & Vegetables will take turns being Responders and Discussants.

Each week will be labelled (e.g. Fruits = responders, Vegetables = Discussants)

**Responders:** You are asked to write **425-475 words** in total, in response to the 5 key questions. Make reference to at least 3 of the assigned resources (readings/videos/podcasts) for this module. Cite your sources (this does not count in your word count). We realize you can't be at all comprehensive with this word limit, but this exercise is designed to get you oriented around how to take notes from and think about the course materials, in preparation for the final test and other assignments. These key questions encourage you to ask the 'so what' questions, to look for and extract the main take-aways and implications from the assigned materials.

**Discussants:** You will read the responses from the 2 responders, and prepare your own submission of **200-250 words:** (i) provide praise or constructive criticism of at least one point from each of the Responders; and (ii) mention one or two additional examples or considerations (in relation to any of the 5 questions) that was not already raised – i.e., 'compliment plus complement.' Cite your sources, from the assigned resources (this does not count in your word count).

### Final test

The final take-home test will be long-answer questions, on similar topics to what you are writing about for the weekly discussions and assignments. Questions might be drawn from the module learning objectives and will draw on key insights and examples from the readings and resources. You will be encouraged to make connections between modules and between readings within modules. The TAs and instructor will give you further guidance in our feedback on the weekly discussions.