Title: Sociology 404 (Special Topic) Farm to Table: The Political Economy of Eating

Preferred Schedule:

I am flexible about what term I teach. In Fall I prefer M/W/F before 2:00pm; Spring T/TH before 2:00 pm. I would also consider a 3-hour evening course—in the case of a larger block of time I will (attempt) to find a classroom where we could use a kitchen and do some cooking as it relates to our readings.

Course Description:

This class examines the national and international policies and processes that have given rise to the contemporary food landscape in the US. We will examine the relationship between “alternative” food systems and “conventional” or “industrial” food systems and explore how issues such as obesity, farmworkers rights, and genetically modified foods are entrenched in these geopolitical systems. We will also examine the racial, class, and gendered aspects of the alternative food movement by examining farmers’ markets as well as the sustainable and organic food movement. Throughout the term students will create a commodity chain analysis of a particular food in order to apply the concepts from the course to a specific food item.

Topics Covered
1) Obesity, hunger and health as neoliberal citizenship

2) Alternative food systems: farmer’s markets and inequality, women’s land ownership, Joel Salatin as celebrity

3) Industrial food systems: factory farming, genetically modified foods and Monsanto, a history of farming on the region

Expected Learning Outcomes

1. Learn and integrate: Through readings, discussions, activities, and lectures, students should understand that food production and consumption is embedded within the political economy of the state.

2. Think and create: Use multiple thinking strategies to examine how social location structures the material world as well as the effects those structures have on different individuals.

3. Communicate: Acquire, articulate, create and convey intended meaning using inclusive verbal and non-verbal methods of communication that demonstrate respect and understanding in a complex society.

4. Clarify purpose and perspective: Explore one’s own perspective about what they eat and why they eat it in order to better foster an understanding of self, relationships, and
5. Practice citizenship: Apply principles of ethical solidarity and empathetic objectivity in one’s thinking about consumption in order to foster an increasing awareness and respect for diversity both locally and globally.

**Methods of Evaluation**

Attendance & Participation  Discussion Facilitation Leader Commodity Chain Analysis  Commodity Chain Analysis Presentation

**Possible Readings** (selections from)


**Writing Assignments:**

**Commodity Chain Analysis**: A term long assignment that will be broken into steps throughout the term and culminate with a symposium for students to present their work and examine each others’ work. Students who want to work in groups may do so, but it is not required.

This project is an examination of how food gets from the field to the plate. For this project students should examine the political economy of a particular food item. For example, where do the seeds to grow the food come from? Where is the food grown? Historically, was a different food grown in that place and why is this food grown there now? Who is doing the labor growing this food? Who is profiting from this food’s production? Student will also consider other questions that push us to explore the nuances of food production and consumption. Pollan’s discussion of corn is a classic example of a commodity chain analysis.
After select a food that can stand up to this level of analysis (recommended foods include, but are not limited to: coffee, tea, sugar, corn, bananas, wheat, quinoa, beef, chicken)

Conduct research order to address the following themes:

A. the history and political economy of people’s relationship with this food

Where is this food originally from? When did it come to the US and who brought it? What are the economic and political relationships between the producing country and the consuming country? Through what route(s) and under what kind of circumstances did it come here?

B. the conditions shaping the production of this commodity what kinds of inputs—fertilizer, petroleum, other food components, etc.—contribute to the production of this food? How is this food produced—does it come from hybrid or genetically modified sees, a family farm, an industrial, large-scale farm? Who works in the production of this commodity? What are the economic, social, political, environmental and cultural contexts surrounding the production of this food? Be sure to consider the labor conditions, local, national or international economic conditions and the domestic and international political conditions, etc., for the production of your commodity. To what extent are transnational corporations and agribusiness involved in the production process?