

**THE SOCIOLOGY OF AGRICULTURE**

*Spring 2012*

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Office Hours: Monday, 4-5,  
and by appointment.

The aim of this course is to introduce you to the field called the sociology of agriculture. This speciality arose about thirty years ago, mainly within rural sociology in North America, as the “political economy of agriculture.” Since the 1990s, it has broadened considerably and been relabeled “agriculture and agrofood systems” (or related terms). Most of our focus in the course will be on theoretical, historical, and empirical problems concerning the United States although two of the books are global in scope. Many of the issues raised apply as well to other regions of the world.

The four-part course begins with an overview of the now-old “new” sociology of agriculture. Then we read two recent books on alternative agriculture in the Midwest and organic farming in California. After the mid-term exam, we examine the current situation and prospects of mid-sized “family farming” in the U. S. along with a Marxist class, or political-economic, analysis of peasants historically and globally. We conclude the course by examining French beans and English food scares in relation to the agricultural producers and suppliers in Africa.

**Texts:** There are five required books and a required packet of readings:

Bell, Michael Mayerfeld. *Farming for Us All: Practical Agriculture and the Cultivation of Sustainability*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004.

Bernstein, Henry. *Class Dynamics of Agrarian Change*. Sterling, VA: Kumarian Press, 2010.

Freidberg, Susanne. *French Beans and Food Scares: Culture and Commerce in an Anxious Age*. NY: Oxford Univ. Press, 2004.

Guthman, Julie. *Agrarian Dreams: The Paradox of Organic Farming in California*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004.

Lyson, Thomas A., G. W. Stevenson, and Rick Welsh, editors. *Food and the Mid-Level Farm: Renewing an Agriculture of the Middle*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008.

These texts are available from Rainbow Bookstore Co-op (426 W. Gilman St.; phone 257-6050). In addition, the set of required readings is for sale at Bob’s Copy Shop (616 University Ave., open M-F, 9-5, and Sat., 10-3; phone 257-4536). This packet contains the readings for the first two weeks, so **buy it now!**

**Course Requirements and Grading**

There are four kinds of requirements for this course: (1) class participation, (2) weekly written comments or questions, (3) a mid-term exam, and (4) a term paper.

(1) Class participation includes (a) being willing and able to discuss the readings each day, and (b) presenting (probably twice) in-class oral comments and discussion questions on the assigned readings. These are to be short presentations, which ideally will lead into a good class discussion of the issues raised in the readings and by your own questions.

(2) The day before--by 5 p.m.--*one* of the two class sessions each week, post on Learn@UW (or email me) two or three brief questions or comments on the readings assigned for that session (or on the discussion from the previous session). I'll read them before class the next day; they will help set the agenda for that session. Send me your first set of questions or comments on *Tuesday, Jan. 24*.

(3) The in-class mid-term exam--on March 12--will be a combination of short-answer and essay questions.

(4) For your term paper, we'll agree on a relevant topic that interests you. It should be 7-8 pages (everything double-spaced, 12-point font); graduate students' papers should be 11-12 pages. Consult with me about your term paper topic by March 28. The paper is due the last day of class, May 9.

I shall say more about all of these requirements in class. Please submit your work on time.

Grades will be determined as follows:

Class participation	15%
Weekly questions/comments	15%
Exam	35%
Term paper	35%

**Note:** The emphasis of this course is on the texts--reading, rereading, questioning, criticizing, and comprehending them. I have chosen the readings carefully; they repay close attention. The main format for our class sessions will be discussion of the reading assignments. Generally I will not lecture at length (especially after the first two weeks), but rather will offer introductions, descriptions, questions, and interpretations to help you understand the texts and their place within the broader social-scientific literature. *The success of the course depends largely upon our group discussion of the readings.* It assumes that you have read and pondered the assignment of the day. The way to learn is to engage the texts and bring your reactions and intellectual struggles to class. That's why we're here.

**Background and further reading for really interested students** (not required for this course): The sociology of agriculture has both a long history and a rapidly growing literature. To be considered a specialist in this field, you must be familiar with both. This class can barely do more than mention much of what you need to know. In order to begin becoming a sociologist of

agriculture, start with a book that summarizes the field up through the 1980s: *The Sociology of Agriculture* by F. H. Buttel, O. F. Larson, and G. W. Gillespie, Jr. (Greenwood, 1990). To keep up with the current literature, see the major journals in the field: *Rural Sociology*, *Sociologia Ruralis*, *Journal of Peasant Studies*, *Journal of Rural Studies*, *International Journal of Agriculture and Food*, *Journal of Agrarian Change*, the often-relevant *Agriculture and Human Values*, and an annual review, *Research in Rural Sociology and Development*. In addition to the articles in these journals, peruse the book reviews if you are really interested.

## **COURSE OUTLINE AND READINGS**

### **I. The Old “New Sociology of Agriculture”**

1/23 Overview

1/25 L. Lobao and K. Meyer, “The Great Agricultural Transition,” Annual Review of Sociology 27, 2001: 103-24.

D. Constance, “The Four Questions in Agrifood Studies: A View from the Bus,” Agriculture and Human Values 26, 2009: 3-14.

1/ 30 K. Kautsky, 1899. “Summary of Selected Parts of Kautsky’s The Agrarian Question” (ed. J. Banaji), in The Rural Sociology of the Advanced Societies, ed. F. H. Buttel and H. Newby (Montclair, NJ: Allanheld, Osmun, 1980), pp. 39-82 [*Skip pp. 50-52 and 54-56*].

2/1 H. Friedmann, “World Market, State, and Family Farm,” Comparative Studies in Society and History 20, 1978: 545-86.

2/6 M. J. Pfeffer, “Social Origins of Three Systems of Farm Production in the U. S.,” Rural Sociology 48 (4), 1983: 540-63.

N. Reinhart and P. Barlett, “The Persistence of Family Farms in United States Agriculture,” Sociologia Ruralis 29 (3/4), 1989: 203-25.

### **II. Alternative Agriculture in Iowa and California**

2/8 Bell, Farming for Us All, pp. 1-70.

2/13 Bell, pp. 71-122.

2/15 Bell, pp. 123-74.

2/20 Bell, pp. 175-250.

2/22 Guthman, Agrarian Dreams, pp. 1-41 and 187-97.

- 2/27 Guthman, pp. 42-88.
- 2/29 Guthman, pp. 89-140.
- 3/5 Guthman, pp. 141-85.
- 3/7 Catch up; review.
- 3/12 *In-class Exam.*

### **III. Trends and Outlooks for Mid-Sized Farms in the U. S. and the World**

- 3/14 Editors, Preface, Food and the Mid-Level Farm.
- F. Kirschenmann et al., “Why Worry about the Agriculture of the Middle?” *ibid.*
- 3/19 M. Duffy, “Appendix: The Changing Status of Farms and Ranches of the Middle,” *ibid.*
- 3/21 Current data on U. S. farming (I’ll give you websites to visit and report on).
- 3/26 K. A. Dahlberg. “Pursuing Long-Term Food and Agricultural Security in the U. S.,” *ibid.*
- T. W. Gray and G. W. Stevenson, “Cooperative Structure for the Middle,” *ibid.*
- A. Guptill and R. Welsh, “Is Relationship Marketing an Alternative . . . ?” *ibid.*
- 3/28 M. Hendrickson et al., “Contractual Integration in Agriculture,” *ibid.*
- G. W. Stevenson and R. Pirog, “Value-Based Supply Chains,” *ibid.*

### **\*\*\* *Spring Break* \*\*\***

- 4/9 E. Brady and C. O’Brady, “Consumer Considerations . . . ,” *ibid.*
- T. A. Lyson, “Civic Agriculture,” *ibid.*
- 4/11 D. E. Ray and H. D. Schaffer, “Toward a Pro-Middle Farm Policy,” *ibid.*
- S. S. Batie, “Sustaining the Middle,” *ibid.*
- Editors, “Epilogue,” *ibid.*

- 4/16 H. Bernstein, Class Dynamics of Agrarian Change, pp. 1-24, 124-30 (Glossary).
- 4/18 Bernstein, pp. 25-60.
- 4/23 Bernstein, pp. 61-100.
- 4/25 Bernstein, pp. 101-23.

#### IV. Food and Farming in Europe and Africa

- 4/30 S. Freidberg, French Beans and Food Scares, Preface and pp. 3-60.
- 5/2 Freidberg, pp. 61-125.
- 5/7 Freidberg, read *either* pp. 127-66 *or* pp. 167-210, *and* (all read) pp. 211-22.
- 5/9 Wrap Up.

\* *Term Paper Due.*

“The assumption of inertia, that cultural and social continuity do not require explanation, obliterates the fact that both have to be recreated anew in each generation, often with great pain and suffering. To maintain and transmit a value system, human beings are punched, bullied, sent to jail, thrown into concentration camps, cajoled, bribed, made into heroes, encouraged to read newspapers, stood up against a wall and shot, and sometimes even taught sociology.”--B. Moore, Jr., Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy, 1966.

“We locate ourselves in society and thus recognize our own positions as we hang from its subtle strings. For a moment we see ourselves as puppets indeed. But then we grasp a decisive difference between the puppet theater and our own drama. Unlike the puppets, we have the possibility of stopping our movements, looking up and perceiving the machinery by which we have been moved. In this act lies the first step toward freedom.”--P. L. Berger, Invitation to Sociology, 1963.

Readings for “Sociology of Agriculture,” CES/SOC 650, Jess Gilbert, Spring 2012:

1. L. Lobao and K. Meyer, “The Great Agricultural Transition: Crisis, Change, and Social Consequences of Twentieth Century US Farming.” *Annual Review of Sociology* 27, 2001: 103-24.
2. D. Constance, “The Four Questions in Agrifood Studies: A View from the Bus.” *Agriculture and Human Values* 26, 2009: 3-14.
3. K. Kautsky, 1899. “Summary of Selected Parts of Kautsky's *The Agrarian Question*,” ed. J. Banaji, in *The Rural Sociology of the Advanced Societies: Critical Perspectives*, ed. F. H. Buttel and H. Newby (Montclair, NJ: Allanheld, Osmun, 1980), pp. 39-82.

4. H. Friedmann, "World Market, State, and Family Farm." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 20 (4), 1978: 545-86.

5. M. J. Pfeffer, "Social Origins of Three Systems of Farm Production in the United States." *Rural Sociology* 48 (4), 1983: 540-63.

6. N. Reinhart and P. Barlett, "The Persistence of Family Farms in United States Agriculture." *Sociologia Ruralis* 29 (3/4), 1989: 203-25.

### Readings for RS/SOC 650, Sociology of Agriculture, Jess Gilbert, Fall 2005

1. H. Newby, "European Social Theory and the Agrarian Question: Towards a Sociology of Agriculture." Pp. 109-23 in G. F. Summers (ed.), Technology and Social Change in Rural Areas (Boulder: Westview, 1983).
2. W. H. Friedland, "Introduction: Shaping the New Political Economy of Advanced Capitalist Agriculture." Pp. 1-34 in Wm. H. Friedland, Lawrence Busch, Frederick H. Buttel, and Alan P. Rudy (eds.), Towards a New Political Economy of Agriculture (Boulder: Westview, 1991).
3. F. H. Buttel, "Some Reflections on Late Twentieth Century Agrarian Political Economy," Sociologia Ruralis 41 (2), 2001: 165-81.
4. K. Kautsky, 1899. "Summary of Selected Parts of Kautsky's The Agrarian Question," ed. J. Banaji, in The Rural Sociology of the Advanced Societies: Critical Perspectives, ed. F. H. Buttel and H. Newby (Montclair, NJ: Allanheld, Osmun, 1980), pp. 39-82.
5. S. A. Mann and J. M. Dickinson, "Obstacles to the Development of a Capitalist Agriculture." J. of Peasant Studies 5 (4), 1978: 466-81.
6. P. H. Mooney, "Toward a Class Analysis of Midwestern Agriculture." Rural Sociology 48 (4), 1983: 563-84.
7. H. Friedmann, "World Market, State, and Family Farm." Comparative Studies in Society and History 20, 1978: 545-86.
8. M. J. Pfeffer, "Social Origins of Three Systems of Farm Production in the U. S.," Rural Sociology 48 (4), 1983: 540-63.
9. S. Salamon, "Ethnic Communities and the Structure of Agriculture," Rural Sociology 50 (3), 1985: 323-40.
10. J. Adams, "Individualism, Efficiency, and Domesticity," Agriculture and Human Values 12 (4), 1995: 2-17.
11. N. Reinhart and P. Barlett, "The Persistence of Family Farms in United States Agriculture," Sociologia Ruralis 29 (3/4), 1989: 203-25.
12. H. Friedmann and P. McMichael, "Agriculture and the State System: The Rise and Decline of National Agricultures, 1879 to the Present." Sociologia Ruralis 29 (2), 1989: 93-117.
13. H. Friedmann, "Distance and Durability: Shaky Foundations of the World Food Economy." Pp. 258-76 in P. McMichael (ed.), The Global Restructuring of Agro-Food Systems (Ithaca: Cornell U. Press, 1994).

An agrarian society, or agricultural society, is any community whose economy is based on producing and maintaining crops and farmland. Another way to define an agrarian society is by seeing how much of a nation's total production is in agriculture. In an agrarian society, cultivating the land is the primary source of wealth. Such a society may acknowledge other means of livelihood and work habits but stresses the importance of agriculture and farming. Agrarian societies have existed in various parts of the world. Abstract Rural sociology has recently developed a new research agenda focussing on the sociology of agriculture. This has led to a revitalization of a field of research that had lost its way since the decline of the rural-urban continuum in the 1960s. The crisis that occurred in rural sociology in the 1970s is discussed in relation both to this theoretical vacuum and to the failure to achieve a policy impact. It is argued that the sociology of agriculture offers a potentially successful means of overcoming this crisis, but some of the difficulties in utilizing this approach are also discussed. Agriculture emerged as people harnessed animals to ploughs, increasing the productive power of hunting and gathering more than tenfold. The resulting surplus freed some people in society from the demands of food production. Individuals began to adopt specialised economic roles: forging crafts, designing tools, raising animals and constructing dwellings.Â

Buttel, Frederick H., Olaf F. Larson, and Gilbert W. Gillespie. 1990. *The Sociology of Agriculture*. New York: Greenwood Press.

Carolan, Michael S. 2012. *The Sociology of Food and Agriculture*. London: Routledge.

Clutton-Brock, Juliet.