

## Covering the Food Chain: The Political Ecology of Eating

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### Course Description:

It might be hard to see what transpire between a child and Big Mac as an ecological event, but of course that's exactly what it is. Like every other creature, we are a species connected to other species, as well as to the earth and the sun, by a food chain—albeit a very special sort of food chain, one that's been shaped by political and economic decisions as much as by biology. This course aims to develop the intellectual context in which to understand, and connect, the many food stories now finding their way to the front page: GMOs, the obesity epidemic, factory farming, animal rights and welfare, antibiotic resistance, agricultural pollution, agricultural subsidies, third world hunger, and the rise of alternatives to the industrial food system, such as organic agriculture and “slow food.” Expect to do lots of reading (from Upton Sinclair and Rachel Carson to Wendell Berry and Eric Schlosser) and writing.

### **Class 1**

August 30, 2004

#### **Introduction**

Putting food in its various contexts: ecological, political, economic, aesthetic, cultural, scientific. Eating as an agricultural and ecological act. The food issue today.

Structure of the class: readings and writings. Expectations and procedures. The Storied Snack (sign up)

In-class writing assignment.

September 6 Labor Day—no class

### **Class 2**

September 13, 2004

#### **The Natural History of Domestication**

Readings: *Guns, Germs and Steel* by Jared Diamond (Part II)  
*The Ecology of Eden* by Evan Eisenberg (Chs. 1 and 2)  
*The Covenant of the Wild* by Stephen Busdiansky (Chs. 1 and 2)  
*Against the Grain: “Why Agriculture?”* Ch. 2  
Optional: *The Botany of Desire* by Michael Pollan (intro)

Workshop: Brainstorming session. Issue themes and categories. Bring “must” subjects.

### **Class 3**

September 20, 2004

#### **Monoculture and The Control of Nature**

Readings: *Seeing Like a State* by James Scott (CH 1 “Nature and Space”; CH 8 “Taming Nature”)  
*Second Nature* by Michael Pollan “Nature Abhors a Vacuum”  
*Silent Spring* by Rachel Carson (excerpts)  
*The Unsettling of America* by Wendell Berry (excerpts)

Workshop: From subject to story  
Story ideas: come prepared to pitch

### **Class 4**

September 27, 2004

#### **From Plant to Commodity: The Case of Corn**

Readings: Richard Manning commodity system study, World Wildlife Fund  
*Corn & Capitalism* by Arturo Warman (pp 1 to 27 plus preface)  
“Translating Maize into Corn” by Betty Fussell (*Social Research*)  
“Maize” encyclopedia entry by Ricardo Salvador  
Readings on Ag Policy: <http://agpolicy.org/blueprint.html>

Workshop: Written pitches due.

### **Class 5**

October 4, 2004

#### **Genetically Modified Crops (I): How New A Paradigm?**

Readings: *Food, Inc.* by Peter Pringle  
“Playing God in the Garden” by Michael Pollan (*New York Times Magazine* Oct 25, 1998)

Workshop: discuss the art of the pitch; refine line up.

**Class 6**

October 11, 2004 (note: class on Columbus Day)

**Genetically Modified Food (II): Feeding the World**

**Readings:** “The Great White Hype” by Michael Pollan  
“Zambia says no”—Chuck Benbrook documents  
Carnegie Report NAFTA  
Joanthan Rausch Atlantic Monthly piece on GMOs  
Sacramento Bee Series:  
[http://www.sacbee.com/static/live/news/projects/biotech/c1\\_1.html](http://www.sacbee.com/static/live/news/projects/biotech/c1_1.html)

Workshop: reporting on the food chain: access and resources; explaining the science

October 18, 2004 No Class: editor/writer meeting; READ

**Class 7**

October 25, 2004

**Meat (I): The Costs of Animal Agriculture**

**Readings:** *The Jungle* by Upton Sinclair  
*Fast Food Nation* by Eric Schlosser  
“Power Steer” by Michael Pollan

Workshop: Progress reports

**Class 8**

November 1, 2003

**Meat( II): What do We Owe the Animals?**

**Readings:** *Animal Liberation* by Peter Singer  
“An Animals Place” by Michael Pollan (optional)  
[templegrandin.com](http://templegrandin.com)

Workshop: First Drafts

**Class 9**

November 8, 2004

**Nutrition and Health (I): The Industrialization of Eating**

Readings: *Food Politics* by Marion Nestle  
Readings on agricultural policy, how we eat now, tba

Workshop: TBA

**Class 10**

November 15, 2004

**Nutrition and Health (II): The Political Economy of Obesity**

Readings: *Fat Land* by Greg Critser  
“The Agricultural Contradictions of Obesity” by Michael Pollan

Workshop: TBA

**Class 11**

November 18, 2004 (Library)

**NOTE Special Thursday Class Workshop with Jack Hitt**

Come prepared to pitch your stories

Jack Hitt office hours on Friday

November 22 No class

**Class 12**

November 29, 2004

**The Politics of Reform (I): Alternative Agriculture and the Counter-Cuisine**

Readings: *Appetite for Change* by Warren Belasco  
*An Agricultural Testament* by Sir Albert Howard (excerpts)  
“The Organic Industrial Complex” by Michael Pollan

Workshop: TBA

**Class 13**

December 6, 2004

**The Politics of Reform (II): Looking Beyond Organic**

Readings: Joel Salatin, Wes Jackson; Slow Food; local food; grass farming

Workshop: Final copy due

Guest: Brian Halwell, author of *Eat Here*

**Class 14**

**NOTE Thursday Class**

December 9, 2004 ( 1:30 pm: Chez Panisse Cafe)

**The Experience of Eating, Reconsidered**

Tour of the restaurant

lunch, menu to be announced

Reading: “The Pleasures of Eating” by Wendell Berry

“Food is Fundamental...” by Paul Rozin