Course Description

Food has become an increasingly political issue, as concerns mount over our food’s safety (given increasing e coli outbreaks and food recalls), its health (with controversies over MSG, antibiotic usage, and obesity and diabetes rates), and its environmental impact (given the burning of fossil fuels in food production and distribution, and the contamination of groundwater from fertilizers, pesticides, and animal waste). The industrialization of food production lies at the root of all of these developments. By “the industrialization of food,” I mean the replacement of the traditional diversified small farm that used natural (“organic”) methods, by single-crop megafarms that use massive applications of fossil fuel and chemicals. In the era of cheap oil, the industrialization of food dramatically lowered the cost of food. But it generated new costs in areas of health, safety, and the environment. And now that the era of cheap oil is coming to a close, even the benefit of low food prices is evaporating.

This course examines the practice of industrial food production, its hidden costs, the politics that put it in place, and the culture that sustains it. It then examines the move toward sustainable agriculture, including sustainable water use, maintenance of soil fertility, and animal husbandry. The final third of the course explores “permaculture” techniques for sustainably producing large amounts of high quality food in one’s own backyard (or even small amounts in one’s dorm room). The final week explores the use of food as a community-building device, overcoming the anonymity of today’s urban and suburb neighborhoods.

Throughout the course, on an almost weekly basis, students will spend part of one class learning “beyond organic” gardening techniques in DU’s Permaculture Garden. (“Permaculture” is a contraction of “permanent agriculture” and involves intensive perennial-based food production (fruit trees, berry bushes, fruiting vines, perennial vegetables) by mimicking the productivity and stability of natural (self-sustaining) ecosystems, in which plants are grouped in symbiotic relationships.)

Students will be expected to read up to 100 pages per week, participate actively in classroom discussions, work well in small groups with other students, and be willing to get dirty doing gardening. “Service learning” (short stints of relevant volunteer work) may also be required.
Required texts
Michael Pollan, *The Omnivore’s Dilemma*
Toby Hemenway, *Gaia’s Garden*
Eric Schlosser, *Fast Food Nation*

All other readings will be posted on Blackboard, or circulated in class, or, if available on the internet, listed with a web address.

Cooperative Learning
This course makes regular use of “cooperative learning” groups. This means working together with, usually, three other students on some assignment or project, usually in-class, but occasionally out of class. These groups will be formed in advance, and you will work with the same group throughout the quarter. Studies show that students learn more and more deeply if they solve a problem with a few others, in a way that asks each to explain their reasoning to the others. Some sessions already indicate that a cooperative learning exercise will be conducted. Others will be announced as we proceed. Cooperative learning necessitates that everyone come prepared (having done the reading and *thought* about it), and participate in the group discussions. Absences are deadly to a cooperative learning exercise, so should not be taken lightly. On these days, if for some reason you must be absent, you MUST email the instructor and your designated workmates IN ADVANCE or get a zero for the day. Cooperative leaning assignments usually end with a joint piece of work of some kind, which will be evaluated by the instructor, and each member of the group will receive the same grade. In other words, you will be collectively responsible for the result. There will be an opportunity at various points in the quarter to anonymously evaluate the contributions of the other members of your group to your group work (i.e., you will give each other a grade), and this will be factored into your final grade.
SYLLABUS (Subject to Revision)

Week O: Discoveries Week
Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday: follow orientation schedule
Friday: Woodbine Ecology Center, near Sedalia, CO. Meet in front of Shwayder Hall at 8:15 a.m. Eat breakfast beforehand. Bring suntan lotion, sunglasses, possibly a sun hat, and a water bottle. Please don’t wear fragrances unless you like bees in your face. Bring a light jacket. Mornings can be chilly.

I. Industrial Food

Week 1: The Origins and Culture of Fast Food
Session 1: Course Introduction
* In-class viewing of “Food, Inc.” http://documentaryaddict.com/Food+Inc-2174-doc.html
Session 2: Creating a Fast Food National Addiction
* Finish viewing and discussing “Food, Inc.”
* Eric Schlosser, Fast Food Nation, 1-10 (introduction), 13-top25 (founders), 31-35, top40-57 (your trusted friends), 120-129 (flavor) [55 pp. total]
* In-class voter registration?

Week 2: The Fast Food Economy
Session 1: Eric Schlosser, Fast Food Nation, 116-top120 (French fry monopsony), 136-top142 (chicken monopsony), mid196-mid197 (hamburger), 149-155 (meatpacking and IBP revolution), mid157-166 (trashing communities), 67-79 (deskilling fast food jobs), 169-180 (meatpacking jobs), 94-102 (pity the franchisee) [67.5 pp. total]
Session 2: Fast Food Nation, 195-mid197 (e coli), mid198-211, 215-221 (lack of recall power, inspectors), 255-top270 (alternatives)
* Scientific American, “The World is Fat” (On Blackboard)
* Student topic

Week 3: Manufacturing Industrial Food
Session 1: Michael Pollan, The Omnivore’s Dilemma, 1-7, 17-56
* campus walk
Session 2: Michael Pollan, The Omnivore’s Dilemma, 65-108
* Career Services presentation?
* How to write a good Introduction

Week 4: The Politics of Industrial Food
Sicker, Fatter, and Poorer (available online at Penrose. Look up book title and create EBL account to access the chapter)
* GMO video, “The Future of Food” (view in class)
www.personalgrowthcourses.net/video/gmo_food_genetically_modified
* OR, roundtable on healthy choices given GMO, pesticides, unsustainable seafood production, and packaging.

Session 2: Open

**Sunday 10 p.m., first paper due, on Industrialization of Food (beef, chicken, or corn)**

II. Sustainable Food

**Week 5**

Session 1: **Foraging wild edibles**
* Sahlins vocabulary
* Anonymous, “Zine, Roadkill” (on Blackboard)

Session 2: **Sustainable meat production**
* Michael Pollan, *The Omnivore’s Dilemma*, top of 125 - top of 136; 139-140; 185-225
* Student topic

**Week 6: Thirsty for Water**

Session 1: * In-class video, *Cadillac Desert: The American West and Its Disappearing Water*, Program 2, An American Nile
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MiSCU9oZ00
* San Diego Union Tribune, “Colorado River may face fight of its life” (on Blackboard as “Colo River threatened”)

* Workshop on revising a paper

III. Growing Food in your Neighborhood, your Backyard, and your Home

**Week 7: Introduction to Permaculture; soil building**

Session 1: * Hemenway, *Gaia’s Garden*, chs. 1 and 2, pp. 1-35
* Work on registration

Session 2: Using nature to improve your soil
* David Biello, “Fertilizer Runoff…” (On Blackboard)
* Hemenway, *Gaia’s Garden*, ch. 4, 71-95
* Vermicomposting (composting with worms)

**Friday, 10 p.m., second paper due. Building on your first paper, describe sustainable alternative to the industrial practice you researched and wrote about for your first paper**
**Week 8: Designing a plant guild; food preservation**

Session 1:  
* Hemenway, *Gaia’s Garden*, 151-162 (beneficial insects and animals)  
  * Hemenway, *Gaia’s Garden*, 36-39 (nature’s patterns), 45-6 (edge), 56-61 (zone and sector), 66 (design process summary), bottom of 130-137 (plant functions), 183-191 (guilding), 209, 216-223 (food forests)  
  * classroom time to work out a plant guild, in preparation for final assignment

Session 2:  
* Sandor Katz, *Wild Fermentation*, 1-43  
  * [http://www.ted.com/talks/paul_stamets_on_6_ways_mushrooms_can_save_the_world.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/paul_stamets_on_6_ways_mushrooms_can_save_the_world.html) (in class viewing)  
  * Sauerkraut demonstration

**Sunday, 10 p.m., email plant notes to instructor.**

**Week 9 Winter gardening** (subject to change)  
Session 1:  
* Michael Pollan, “Open Letter to the President”  
  * Student topics

Session 2:  
  * GrowHaus tour? Meet at Shwayder curbside.

**Week 10 Ecovillages**  
Session 1:  
* Go to the “Dancing Rabbit Ecovillage” website (do a web search).  
  (1) Read “About DR.” After reading it, click on the “vision” link embedded in the text. From the vision page, read the following links: Mission statement, ecological covenant, sustainability guidelines, details of our vision.  
  (2) Go back to the homepage and click on DR TV; click on “Organic Farming” at the top of the page and view “Sustainable Agriculture and Community at Sandhill Farm.”  
  (3) Go back to the homepage and go to the “food” page from the link under “Ecoliving.” Read at least three of the articles linked to the page which most interest you. On a single sheet of paper, jot down a few talking points for each of these which will help you describe them to your peers during our discussion. This sheet will be handed in at the end of class.  
  (4) All of this shouldn’t take you much more than an hour. If you are intrigued, please read more!  
  * visit and read [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/08/20/photos-7-modern-day-green_n_687530.html#s128552](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/08/20/photos-7-modern-day-green_n_687530.html#s128552)  
  * In-class viewing of “30 Days,” on Dancing Rabbit (50 minutes, as time allows)

Session 2:  
* **Group presentations:** designs for edible backyards. 15 minutes per group  
  * Peer review (an opportunity to evaluate the contributions of your peers to your small group work)
Course Requirements and Grading

Course credit will be based on class participation, papers, plant notes, cooperative learning assignments, quizzes, and occasional reading notes and outlines. I reserve the right to adjust the assignments as we proceed. In calculating your grade, the various components of this course will be weighed in roughly the following proportions: 50% papers, 20% class participation, 10% final presentation, 5% presentation on special topic, 15% notes, outlines, quizzes, cooperative learning assignments.

Participation: Class time will be devoted primarily to discussion of the readings, sometimes in a small group setting, and sometimes with the full class. It makes no sense to come to class if you haven’t done the readings: you will get very little out of the discussion, and others will get nothing out of you. You do not get credit for showing up; you get credit for speaking up. On the other hand, the classroom is not a competitive arena. If you make one reasonably thoughtful comment in our full-class discussions on a given day, you get full credit for the day. Come with a question or comment in mind. Also, I’ll occasionally ask a “no-brainer” question. If you’ve nothing else to say for the day, or are simply shy, at least take advantage of these. We’ll all thank you for it, as it will help us keep discussion at a steady pace. Above all, be sensitive to the classroom dynamic, for which we are all responsible. Don’t take over the discussion; disagree respectfully; keep your comments on topic; try to refer to your classmates by name when referencing a point they have made (this helps keep things civil—reminding us that there is a person behind every opinion).

Papers: Papers will be divided into a style component (worth one third) and a content component (worth two thirds).

Extension policy: Paper due dates are announced, and paper topics handed out, well in advance of the deadline. If you budget your time and start your paper early, you should have no trouble getting your paper in on time, even if you fall ill. There are no deadline extensions in this course, with exception made only for (documented) hospitalization or death in one’s immediate family. There are no extensions for illness, extracurricular activities, other schoolwork, or anything else. However, I do accept late papers, at a penalty of one-third of a letter grade for each day late, beginning one minute after the deadline.

Notes, outlines, and quizzes: I will occasionally ask you to submit notes or outlines on a reading, usually because I judge the reading to be particularly tricky or to require the connecting of some dots. Notes should be one or two pages long, no longer. Good notes record questions and insights you have and connections you make. There will also be occasional quizzes. If everyone continues to do the reading and discussions remain lively, fewer quizzes will be administered.