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:


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:

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<tr>
<th>Requirement</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>Class participation</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<td>Weekly questions/comments</td>
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<td>Exam</td>
<td>35%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Term paper</td>
<td>35%</td>
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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


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.

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.


3/21 Current data on U. S. farming (I’ll give you websites to visit and report on).


*** Spring Break ***

   T. A. Lyson, “Civic Agriculture,” ibid.

   S. S. Batie, “Sustaining the Middle,” ibid.
   Editors, “Epilogue,” ibid.
“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:


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


Importantly, many of his findings and observations anticipate the political economy studies in the sociology of agriculture of the late twentieth century. He wrote of the hardships faced by both rural communities and individuals in the ensuing economic revolution brought about by impoverished lands, changes in the commercial demand for tobacco and the methods for. Elective courses include sociology of agriculture, environmental sociology, social change and development, and community and development. After completing their coursework, students must then successfully pass preliminary and oral examinations; and successfully write and defend a high quality thesis or dissertation on a topic appropriate to the Agriculture and Development area. Currently there are about 30 graduate students in this signature theme, the majority of who are supported by graduate research assistantships.