

**FOOD RESOURCES, SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS
AND COMMUNITY FOOD SECURITY**

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Course Description

Food has a large impact on sustainability (i.e., environment, economy and social aspects). Food systems include production, processing, distribution, consumption, and waste disposal. About one third of households' total environmental impact is related to food and drink consumption. This large impact is from the indirect or direct effects of livestock agriculture and food industry on water, soil and air, the overuse of fish resources, the increase of food transport and packaging waste. Also, industrial food systems have a strong dependence on fossil energy with seven times the energy (typically fossil fuel) being consumed for every unit of food energy produced. There is thus a need to work with natural processes to conserve all resources, minimize waste, and lessen food's impact on the environment, as well as its social and economic aspects.

“Community food Security is a condition in which all community residents obtain a safe, culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate diet through a sustainable food system that maximizes community self reliance and social justice” (Hamm and Bellows, 2003). About 10% of Canada's population is food insecure at some time during the year, meaning they are not sure where their next meal is coming from. Food insecurity takes other forms that affect the whole population, such as unhealthy food, displacement of people and disruption of culture, loss of farmland and increasing dependence on food imports. This course will explore the many components of this problem, alert you to solutions and progress, and will help you develop knowledge and skills that will increase your understanding and your ability to become a change agent.

This class will ask: Why is the food system unsustainable? If food is plentiful and cheap, why do people lack nourishing food? The following issues will be explored:

Environmental Issues

- Dependence of agricultural on fossil fuel in Canada and industrialized world.
- Total cropland acres are decreasing.
- The rate of groundwater withdrawal exceeds recharge rates in many major agricultural regions.
- Nutrient runoff is creating water pollution and hypoxic “dead zones.
- Less than 20% of corn, soy, and cotton plants were genetically engineered in 1996; by 2007 between 40%-90% were (varies by type).
- Despite a tenfold increase in insecticide use since 1945, crop losses due to insect damage have nearly doubled.
- Agricultural activities in Canada are responsible for almost 10% of greenhouse gas emissions in 2006.

Indigenous land rights

- Environmental health concerns of indigenous people tied to colonization of diet and poverty.
- Ignoring historical indigenous agricultural practices favours colonization and land usurpation
- sustainable livelihoods

Politics

- Industry pressures – sugar, chemical companies, biofuel subsidies, etc.
- Calorie rich-nutrient deficient supports – government subsidies.

Economics

- Globalization of companies and flight of jobs keep wages low
- Farm subsidies focus production on a few commodities, like corn and soy
- WTO and the dumping of crops in developing countries

Farm problems

- Consolidation in the food industry, making it difficult for small farmers to sell their crops.
- Consolidation of farms, squeezing out many local farmers
- Loss of farmland to erosion and development
- Collapse of small towns dependent on farming, suburbanization

Food access issues

- Cheap, processed food makes people obese and sick
- Supermarkets are missing in rural, northern, First nation and inner city settings
- People have lost basic cooking skills and connection with food

Are there solutions?

How can people become more self-reliant and improve their food skills?

How can the government affect the availability and affordability of nutritious food?

How can we save local communities, and preserve agricultural land?

How do we learn from Indigenous wisdom?

How can the food available become nutritious rather than fat and sugar-laden?

In what ways can we build community around the basic necessity of food that in turn creates creative solutions to community problems and helps create resource opportunities and know-how?

The course educational objectives

Students will:

1. Analyze sustainability of food resources.
2. Discuss sustainable livelihoods in food production and processing.
3. Assess community food security.
4. Discuss the different options for sustainable agriculture and sustainable food and the role of environmental farm plans and organic certification.
4. Consider and assess interventions to improve sustainability of food resources.

A nutrition or agriculture background is not required for this course.

Readings will be available in the photocopy room, WebCT and/or computer disk is available to copy.

Grading by Projects/Activities	% of grade
1. Presentation of two readings to the class over the semester	20
3. Ethnographic dietary assessment	25
4. Community food assessment or environmental farm plan (group project)	45
5. Journal from fieldtrips.	<u>10</u>
	100%

Projects:

1. Presentation of class readings: Time: 8-10 minutes

Over the course of the term, students will sign up to introduce readings to the class and stimulate discussion. The type of introduction I am interested in is to have you provide some context – why discuss this now? Who is the author/organization? What did you learn? You may also critique the article but be careful to do so in a way that provokes rather than silences discussion. Relate to the reading personally and ask the students to respond to you. Ask them specify questions about the reading and its purpose.

We will discuss the readings in class, and **everyone** should be prepared to respond. If it becomes clear that students are not keeping up with the readings, I will assign short response papers that will count towards this mark.

2. Ethnographic dietary assessment: why do people eat they way they do?

Training: Interview two persons/families; oral reports

The purpose of this assignment is to explore the complexity of *eating behavior and food patterns* using the techniques of an anthropologist (ethnography). The object of your research is to make explicit the factors that cause **two** persons and/or families to choose to eat certain foods and food combinations, cooked in specific ways and with specific spices at specific places/times. The best method, which is not always possible, is to have a meal with an individual or a family, observe his/her kitchen, cooking and eating style and food choices. If eating out is more typical, observe them in a restaurant/fast food/dining hall, watch what they eat, and explore their habits around food, their choices. For students, you will want to explore how they eat at home, compared to school. What factors, both conscious and subconscious, guide these choices? What is their family food history? Explore both reality and nostalgia, how they eat vs. how they would like to eat, what food/eating means to them. What are the contingencies that shape food behavior, such as availability, time, cost, health, kitchen adequacy, skills, knowledge?

As an anthropologist your job is to observe and ask “why” without being obnoxious or too obvious. Try to get at deeper meanings. Always to make your understanding explicit to your informant, as a check on what you think you are observing or hearing. In other words, you would say, “this is what I hear you saying ” or “this is how I understand what you just said”, then you would repeat back what you think

they are saying. One cannot make the assumption that words mean the same to everyone. Also, some people are not so clear verbally.

You should know in advance what you want to find out – make a list and have it around to check on. You should not have a pre-formed interview schedule. You need to watch carefully, to dig sometimes, to observe sometimes, to try to understand the context. You may have to wade through other information.

- a. Perform two such interviews, which should be on persons older than 30, or on kids or persons we encounter in Manitoba. People love to talk about food. Many people would love to spend time with you and be observed.
- b. Paper: 5 pages, 12 font, double-spaced. (1)Write a **2 page summary of each interview**, discussing what themes you found in each with examples (themes may be factors, deeper meanings, etc., that influence eating behavior.) **Then write one page contrasting the interviews and discussing your findings. You may also discuss the process.**
- c. **In class** you will report on **one of your interviews** in depth and the other in short summary. The whole class will discuss the issue of eating behavior themes. Your oral report should be about 10 minutes. You do not need visuals. Do not use the real name of your interviewees.

3. Community Food Security Assessment or Environmental Farm Pan

Project Due Date: Oral report in 2nd last class; written report due following week.

The written report should be a group effort and amount to about 10-12 pages, with an **Introduction** about food security assessment and what segment of food security you are working on, a **Methods** section detailing how you got your data, a **Results** section in which you show your assessment data, a **Discussion** section, in which you talk about the significance, merits and possible errors in your data (hearsay, non representative, poor measures, etc.), and a **Conclusions** or summary section. You should also have a **References** section, in which you give the citations for your data and interviews.

4. Journal of Field trips.

A personal expression of any transformative learning from the field trips. This could include writing, pictures and including related materials into a journal to express your thinking and learning on two field trips. The journal will be required in the fifth class after the two field trips.

Policy regarding late assignments: Failure to submit an assignment will result in a mark of zero on that assignment; reports submitted late will not be accepted without special permission prior to the assignment's due date.

SYLLABUS

Class 1: Introduction/Community Food Security – why is it even an issue?

Class 2: Food politics

Class 3: Holistic farm management and Environmental Farm Plan: Field Trip to farm

Class 4: Indigenous agriculture and traditional foods. Field trip to reserve and school or community project (Fort Whyte's Farm)

Class 5: First Nations, food quality on reserves and Ecosystem health (*journal due*)

Class 6: Dietary food assessments (*presentations of ethnography study*)

Class 7: Current versus Sustainable food systems

Class 8: Community food assessments

Class 9: Community gardens and other local food resources

Class 10: Community economic development and food resources

Class 11: Poverty and access to food resources

Class 12: Food security and grow local movements (*presentations – Community food assessment or environmental farm plan*)

Class 13: Solutions to health and environmental issues of current food system (*Community food assessment or environmental farm plan*)