

Course Description
“Farm as Socio-Environmental Endeavor”
Spring Semester, 2008
Tues & Thurs 2:30-3:45 209 Animal Science
(10 March version)

Then with a pleasant smile made answer the jovial farmer: ‘Safer are we unarmed, in the midst of our flocks and cornfields.’

Evangeline, by Longfellow

Instructors: Bill Bland (coordinator), all enrolled students

Brief Description: We propose that a farm can be usefully analyzed as an intentional entity shaped by the opportunities and constraints presented by the social and biophysical contexts in which it must operate. Physical and biological contexts shape ecological possibilities, through cycling of energy and mass, while social contexts exert constraints through profitability considerations and cultural norms. This course provides an analytical framework for understanding how the diversity of farms emerges from these opportunities and constraints.

Learning Goals:

1. Students will become aware of the diverse factors that shape the natures of extant agricultural endeavors worldwide.
2. Students will access sources of information about agricultural production statistics, soil and climate resources, how biotic interactions shape practices, household decision-making, and social influences on agricultural practice.
3. Students will integrate information from diverse sources into a case study of an agricultural endeavor.
4. Students will learn and apply a framework for researching and coming to understand particular farming systems.

Case Study Exercises: Each student will develop a case study of an extant agricultural livelihood endeavor, i.e., so typical agricultural enterprise, be it a subsistence farmer or a publicly-held corporation. The endeavor must be from outside of the US, and the case study should describe it in the context of the selected country (along with the many other contexts we will explore). You will present your cases incrementally through the semester as the narrative is expanded to include each context. On three dates indicated on the syllabus, a write-up addressing the previously-addressed contexts must be handed in, in hardcopy. This interim report should be 1000-1500 words in length, cite 4-8 references, and *contain a paragraph describing your information search strategy* (both what worked and didn’t). The final narrative should be about 6000 words in length, with sources carefully documented (in any standard format). Cases will also be presented orally in class at the end of the semester.

Class Organization: The class meets twice weekly for 75 minutes each day. Nine broad contexts are addressed:

- Plant, Animal Increase
- Climate, Soil
- Plant-Insect and Plant-Plant Interactions
- Socio-cultural, Economic, and Land Tenure

For the majority of these contexts students will work in teams to present key concepts to the class, working from the outline provided, but with great liberty to chose what aspects to emphasize. Teams should assume that all class members are capable of reading the outline. Teams should

imagine a (quick-to-learn) classmate who has had little exposure to the context (e.g., an entomologist who has never had a course in soils). The presentation should emphasize the core ideas that this student should know about the context in order to ask good questions about why farmers do what they do, and to translate the answers they receive into the terminology of the research and reference literature. Teams should also identify one or two relevant readings (of appropriate length) for the class to read. These reading and other resource material will be made available on the course website. For each context at least one faculty member resource person is available for consultation. Professor Bland would like to meet with each team at least once as they plan their classes (but he is keen to meet several times).

Calendar

Date	Discussion Topic	Instructor
Tues 1/22	Intro to course and Holon Agroecology	Bland
Th 1/24	Holon Agroecology (continued)	Bland
Tues 1/29 Th 1/31	Information resources Ways of knowing about farmers	Phillips Bland
Tues 2/5	Land Tenure (tentative)	Peter Bloch
Th 2/7 Tues 2/12	Soil	Laurel G. Marie S.
Th 2/14 Tues 2/19	Climate	Bill S.
Th 2/21* Tues 2/26 Th 2/28	Animal Increase	Martha R. Thais P-F.
Tues 3/4 Th 3/6 Tues 3/11 Th 3/13*	Socio-cultural-economic	Andrew B. Matt Robinson Vincent S.
3/15-3/23	SPRING BREAK	
Tues 3/25 Th 3/27	Plant Increase	David D.
Tues 4/1 Th 4/3	Plant-Plant interactions	Dave Stoltenberg Randy Jackson
Tues 4/8 Th 4/10*	Plant-Insect interactions	Rachel M. Katelin H.
Tues 4/15 Th 4/17	Government Policy	Matt Raboin Julie S.
Tues 4/22 Th 4/24	Case Study Presentations	All
Tues 4/29 Th 5/1	Case Study Presentations	All
Tues 5/6 Th 5/9	Case Study Presentations	All

*Case study interim reports due