Foundations of Sustainable Agriculture  
(SusAg 610, AE 610, Agron 610, Soc 610)  
Fall 2007  
Tuesday-Thursday 11:00-12:20 – Morrill Hall 2015

SYLLABUS

INSTRUCTORS:
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CATALOG DESCRIPTION:
Historical, biophysical, socioeconomic, and ethical dimensions of agricultural sustainability. Strategies for evaluating existing and emerging systems of agriculture in terms of core concepts of sustainability and their theoretical contexts.

REQUIRED TEXT:

COURSE WEBPAGE:
The course webpage can be reached via WebCT (http://www.celt.iastate.edu/webct/ or via a link on the ISU homepage). Use the “WebCT Gold” login. If you are registered for the course, when you log in to WebCT you will find a link to the course webpages. If you are not registered for the course, we will need to add you to the class list so that you can connect via WebCT. Please email or see Dr. Anex to get yourself added to the WebCT class list.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:
• To increase understanding of the historical roots, ethical questions, social and economic policies and farming practices relevant to thinking on sustainable agriculture and the development of sustainable agricultural systems
• To enhance critical thinking and analysis of complex, interdisciplinary problems facing agricultural systems along with possible solutions
• To gain familiarity with techniques and principles important for assessing research and for formulating research in sustainable agriculture
• To facilitate student development by:
  o Increasing willingness to investigate personal beliefs, worldviews and preconceptions
  o Increasing understanding and appreciation of the beliefs, worldviews and preconceptions of others
  o Sharing responsibility for the success of the course
• To create an intellectual community for the discussion of questions, ideas, research and issues related to sustainable agriculture

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:
• Class members will be introduced to the historical roots of sustainable agriculture
• Class members will be introduced to multiple perspectives on sustainable agriculture, and will be provided with resources to enable them to continue pursuing these perspectives on their own.
• Class members will be conversant with major concepts, themes, debates and discourse in sustainable agriculture
• Class members will be introduced to some of the classic and contemporary literature necessary for an understanding of sustainable agriculture
• Class members will gain an improved ability to communicate with others about sustainable agriculture and sustainability
• Class members will use case studies as a vehicle to discuss controversial issues and to understand the complexity and multiple perspectives associated with them

ASSESSMENT:
Class participation (20%)  
   a) Contribution to class discussion
   b) Presentation of synopses
Annotations (5%)
Synopses of readings (20%)
Midterm Essay Assignment (20%) – Due Monday, October 8th
Case Study (15%)
End of term Essay Assignment (20%)

CLASS ASSIGNMENTS:
Synopses of Readings: For each assigned reading, students should turn in a brief but thoughtful synopsis before the beginning of the assigned class period. For some readings, students will also be asked to respond with short responses to one or more questions related to the reading in addition to a synopsis. An effective synopsis might be no more than a short paragraph in length, but should demonstrate a thoughtful understanding of the reading in question. Reading synopses should be submitted as Word files to all four instructors, and a copy brought to class the day it is due. Recommended readings can be used as supplemental material for the reading synopsis but the assigned readings are the focus for these reflections. During each class, someone will be called upon to present the synopsis of the day.

Class Bibliography: The class will, as a group, develop an annotated bibliography of readings related to sustainable agriculture. Each student is expected to contribute three entries to the class bibliography. Entries are expected to include complete bibliographical information and a fairly complete factual description of the reading, in addition to any editorial comments you choose to make. Add a rating of 1 to 5 stars as to whether you would recommend this reading to others. The annotation should be posted on the class WebCT site, and turned in electronically to all members of the teaching team. The first
annotation is due September 27th, the second is due October 30th, and the third will be due November 15th (to avoid overlap with the case studies).

**Midterm and End of Term Essay Assignments:** At the midpoint and end of the term, students will turn in an essay. This essay will respond to one question from a list distributed in advance.

**Student Portfolio:** Each student will turn in their End-of-Term essay assignment as part of a portfolio that contains all of the student’s work for the semester, including the graded versions of the midterm essay and all synopses. It will not need to include a copy of the case study. The portfolio can be assembled as a computer file (if you scan them in) or a printed document.

**Case Studies:** Students will work in groups to develop a case study exercise to be presented in class at the end of the term. Groups will choose their case study topic. Topics should be identified and approved by the teaching team by October 16.

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**CLASS SCHEDULE:** (Note: The schedule may be altered. Most readings are available through WebCT.)

**I. INTRODUCTION**

21 Aug *Introduction to the Class*

**II. HISTORICAL ROOTS**

23 Aug *Roots of Modern Agriculture I (Zdorkowski)*  
Reading:  

28 Aug *Roots of Modern Agriculture II (Zdorkowski)*  
Reading:  

30 Aug *Philosophical Roots of Sustainable Agriculture I: Agriculture in Environmental Ethics (Wolf)*  
Reading:  

4 Sept *Historical Roots of Sustainable Agriculture II (VISITOR: FRED KIRSCHENMANN)*
6 Sept **Historical Roots of Sustainable Agriculture I (VISITOR: MATT LIEBMAN)**  
Reading:  
To be announced  

11 Sept **Philosophical Roots of Sustainable Agriculture II (Wolf)**  
Reading:  

### III. MAJOR INFLUENCES

13 Sept **Productionism (Anex)**  
Reading:  

18 Sept **Biotechnology and Sustainable Agriculture: Golden Rice Case Study (Wolf)**  
Reading:  
To be announced

20 Sept **Movie: King Corn**  
Reading:  

### MIDTERM QUESTIONS DISTRIBUTED

25 Sept **Discussion King Corn (All)**  
Reading:  
To be announced  

27 Sept **The Farm Bill--Discussion**  
Reading:  
To be announced
28-30 Sept **PRAIRIE FESTIVAL: Weekend Field Trip to Salina Kansas**
Optional, but it will be fun!
[http://www.landinstitute.org/vnews/display.v/ART/2005/10/10/4349fee455dff](http://www.landinstitute.org/vnews/display.v/ART/2005/10/10/4349fee455dff)

2 Oct **Global Effects (Anex)**
Reading:

4 Oct **Nature as Model (Zdorkowski)**
Reading:
Additional reading to be announced

**MIDTERM ESSAY DUE**

9 October **Workshop: Creating Case Studies (Wolf)**
Reading:
To be announced

11 Oct **Appropriate Scale (Anex)**
Reading:
Additional reading to be announced

16 Oct **Systems I: Concepts and Conceptualizations (Wells)**
Reading:

18 Oct **Systems II: Economic Systems (Wolf)**
Reading:
IV. BOUNDARIES

23 Oct Sustainable Agriculture and Social Justice (Wells)
Reading:
Another reading to be announced

25 Oct Sustainable Agriculture and Animal Ethics (Wolf)
Reading:

30 Oct Sustainability: Contested Concept (Wolf)
Reading:

1 Nov Sustainability: Boundaries of the Concept: (Zdorkowski, Wolf)
Readings:
To be announced

6 Nov Midpoint discussion and reflection

V. THE NATURE OF INQUIRY

8 Nov Interdisciplinarity (Anex, Wells, Wolf, Zdorkowski)
Reading:
Additional reading to be announced

13 Nov Why does Scale Matter? (Anex)
Reading:

15 Nov Quantitative and Qualitative Research (Wells)
Reading:
Trochim, William M. "Positivism and Post-Positivism" http://www.socialresearchmethods.net/kb/positvsm.htm
(version current as of August 10, 2006).
20 Nov *FALL BREAK*

22 Nov *FALL BREAK*

**VI. CASE STUDIES**

MONDAY NOV 26—EACH GROUP SHOULD SUBMIT ITS CASE STUDY ELECTRONICALLY, TO ALL INSTRUCTORS, IN ITS FINAL FORM, EACH AS A SINGLE WORD DOCUMENT

27 Nov *Group Case Studies—Class Presentations*

29 Nov *Group Case Studies—Class Presentations*

4 Dec *Group Case Studies—Class Presentations*

**FINAL ESSAY QUESTIONS DISTRIBUTED**

6 Dec *Wrap Up*

Class Feedback

**END OF TERM ESSAY:**

Due on scheduled date of ‘Final Exam.’ There will be no final exam in this course.