This course explores historical relations of food and agriculture, including property, power, exchange, knowledge, and culture. We will begin with emerging perspectives that try to take seriously the reality of humans as one species in the web of life. Key themes and literatures will be farming systems (including land, labour, kinship/community/market/state), landscapes (natural places shaped by and shaping human activities), and ways in which analysis requires transcalar approaches to time and place. By taking a very long perspective, we will avoid the traps of dichotomies such as “dominant” and “alternative,” and interpret jurisdictional or regulatory institutions in deep historical context. In order to understand emergent possibilities in the present, we will look for “lost possibilities” in the past, including the adaptations of cultural practices, knowledges, and relationships outside the orbit of power. The readings help us to foster an attitude of openness and curiosity, avoiding polarizing opinions in favour of analytical depth.

How is human foodgetting both like and unlike the environment-making of all species? There is a growing consensus in policy, social movement, and even corporate thought that recent (50 years? 100 years? 500 years?) institutions have, led human foodgetting to endanger human habitats in multiple ways, all centred on changes from complex self-organizing ecosystems (including farmers) towards simplified ecosystems centred on a handful of grains and livestock. Before diving into long historical works, we start with two recent reports by international networks and organizations on the problem and solutions of the agrifood system, and a brief introduction to the inherited governing institutions in need of change.

Then we go more deeply into each: 1) the deep history of humans in the web of life, including migration, colonization, and extinction; 2) social and geographical changes that came with early empires, with cities and distinct classes of peasants; 3) the “second nature” created by colonial monocultures and attendant changes in diet; 4) the diasporic creativity of enculturated humans and co-domesticates emerging in the shadow of colonial power; 5) new views of foodgetting arising from ecological science and appreciation of traditional knowledge sometimes in danger of extinction, and 6) new ways of understanding farming, conservation, land use, knowledge, and seeds that dispel the illusions of second nature and recover the evolving realities of human foodgetting in our earthly home.

I hope prospective students can come to a special introductory class September 9, which replaces the first scheduled class meeting September 13, which unfortunately conflicts with a small invited workshop I cannot miss on “Seeds, Soils, and Politics” (September 12-16). I hope to bring new insights from this into the class. On September 9, I will introduce themes, structure and evaluation, as well as
design to encourage engaged participation. For context to what will likely be a mind-expanding set of readings, I suggest that students watch the following brief lectures from a conference in Stockholm in spring 2016:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eqyjva1zdbw
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tah8QlhQLeQ

and if you like the second one, you might want to watch the longer talk from 2015 by the same speaker (Johan Rockström, Executive Director of Stockholm Resilience Centre (http://www.stockholmresilience.org):

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1WFtCAdCm84

Evaluation:

Weekly summaries (best 6) 30%
Essay Proposal (due October 18) 5%
Essay 45%
Class Participation (critical discussion—see below) 20%

Summaries: One half to one page on each reading; focus on argument, method, and evidence as appropriate. This is not a “response” or “reflection,” but the best summary you can do. You may be surprised at how different summaries by class members will be; these differences give rise to opportunities for clarification. Try to avoid stating what the author has not done in the summary. You may add a short question (one or at most two sentences) at the end; this may be something puzzling or interesting; as the course progresses, try to identify points of contention, convergence, gaps, difference, etc. related to other readings; turn this into a brief question. Submit by Monday 9am. You are encouraged to read other students summaries before class. If I can figure it out, we can do this on the course website. Otherwise, email to me, and I will circulate to the class.

Proposal: 2-3 pages. Due October 18. Although you may change your mind about the topic (issue, frame, or both) as you read more, and will certainly refine your question, the proposal will help you focus your reading early in the term.

Essay: Choose a subject related to the themes and concepts introduced in the course.

Class participation. We will work together towards deepening understanding of political ecology of food through critical discussion of assigned texts. Please remember that criticism means analysis, both positive and negative, of texts, not opinion. Questions arising from summaries and from differences among summaries will guide our collective analysis.
Much depends on the culture of discussion we develop in class. Here are a few ground rules to help us develop a class culture of collective critical discussion.

1. Try to suspend reactions. Attached as we all are to our opinions, try to bring the attitude of questioning in your summaries into class. In practice, when you hear a point that seems wrong, misguided, etc., try to turn that reaction into a question: why do you think that?

2. Cultivate careful speech. Try to speak with honesty and clarity. This is consistent with passion sometimes, but more often with patience.

3. Cultivate awareness of group dynamics and your own role in the group. If you notice that you speak less than others, try to speak more often; if you notice you speak more than others, hold back and observe how the discussion goes. When you hold back, try to listen carefully to the unfolding discussion rather than wait for the opportunity to make your point. If your point remains important, you can make it when the time is right to change direction.

4. Please remind me if I react, insist on an opinion, etc. These skills are rarely encouraged in an academic culture of debate and challenge, or in the wider culture of chatter. I am learning, too.

5. I will lead discussions at the beginning, based on interests, insights, and questions in your summaries. I will also introduce any important themes or relevant context missing from your summaries. As the term progresses, we can assess whether and how to change this format.

Draft Schedule

September 9: Introduction

September 20 Consensus on Change, Not on How

Readings: Two 2016 reports by a “Panel of Experts” led by the former UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food (IPES-Food) and UN Environment Program


http://www.unep.org/resourcepanel/KnowledgeResources/AssessmentAreasReports/Food

September 27 What are inherited geography and governance mechanisms?

Readings:


**Recommended:**


**October 4 How are humans like other species as foodgetters and environment-makers (extinction, migration, colonization)?**

**Readings:**


**Recommended:**


**October 11 Co-domestication of humans and plants**


Benyus, Janine, Biomimicry: *Design from the Heart of Nature*

Or watch TED talk:  
October 18 How are humans different from other species in environment-making: empires, peasants, cities


Recommended:


October 25 (no class)

November 1 Colonial frontiers, monocultures and exotic diets


Recommended:


**November 8 Colonial Settlement and second nature**


Recommended:


**November 15 Diasporic Agronomy and Cuisines**


Something on urban ag, maybe Ricado Jacobs on Cape Town

**November 22. Ecology and Foodgetting**


**November 29 Seeds:**

“Seed is the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end of the agricultural production process. The genetic characteristics that can be embedded in the seed shape the production process through which that seed is going to pass. The seed is a critical nexus for capital, but it’s not the only one. We see corporate globalisation not
just in the seed industry but in animal production, pesticide production, pharmaceuticals and health sciences, energy, and the media. The great social problem of our time is the increasing concentration of economic power, and therefore cultural power and political power, in the hands of an increasingly narrow set of companies.” (Jack Kloppenburg) http://www.grain.org/article/entries/542-jack-kloppenburg


Recommended:
ETC Group www.etcgroup.org/
http://www.usc-canada.org/what-we-do/seeds-of-survival

December 6. Commons


Recommended:


