



Food, Land, and Society: Diverse Perspectives on Agricultural Ecology, Economics, and Policy

Teaching Strategy

Ivette Perfecto and Catherine Badgley team teach an undergraduate course called *"Food, Land, and Society."* This course explores the interactions among economic and political factors that influence agricultural systems and the sustainability of food production, land use, and rural communities.

The most engaging part of this course is a series of three field trips during the semester and a trip to Mexico in the spring. Students visit organic as well as non-organic farms to experience, compare, and contrast different farming methods for livestock and plant crops. Going out and hearing about particular agricultural practices and what forces are influencing them allows students to experience different perspectives from a variety of stakeholders within the agricultural system.

Although students discuss the pros and cons of agricultural and land use policies and practices, the faculty do not advocate for any particular perspective.

There are no exams in this course. Rather, evaluative papers give students the opportunity to critically analyze the different forces at work, to formulate their own position, and to be able to discuss it intelligently with supporting evidence.

Faculty Perspectives

"We talk a lot about the environmental impacts, health impacts, and social impacts because sustainability is not just about the environment."

"We want students to get a sense of what the actual ecological processes are and how people have manipulated those under different kinds of agricultural systems, including ancient and indigenous farming methods, from the entire history of agriculture."

Student Perspectives

"Prior to this class I had thought of sustainability as only a matter of reducing energy intakes. Now I understand sustainability to be more of a practice - a standard of practice - not a few isolated actions done to reduce greenhouse gas emissions."

"We witnessed the full range of agricultural ventures, from industrial farms and Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs) to hoop houses and urban agriculture. Not only was the class able to see sustainable agricultural methods in practice, we were able to further understand what it means to purchase from a community supported farm, what it means to purchase organic meat, and which urban agriculture methods can be used to empower impoverished communities facing food desert situations."

"This class was inspiring because it gave us the knowledge to be conscious and proactive advocates and consumers."

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Examples of Teaching and/or Student Artifacts



Pig Farm (CAFO)



Organic Hoop House