

# PS 3290 Human Security -- The Politics of Food

Professor Stephen Keller, Office: SN2047 Tel: 709-737-3096  
Spring 2011 T-Th 9-10:15

S-2036

FOOD: Some people have it, fewer control it, EVERYONE NEEDS IT.

Is there enough food for everyone in the world? What is "food security"? Should hungry Third World people be satisfied with whatever aid donor nations contribute, including genetically modified foods? In conflict situations can food aid be limited to vulnerable populations (and kept from combatants)? What are the consequences of huge western agribusinesses dominating global and local food production, processing, and distribution? Should governments intervene in individuals' food choices, (supplements, diets, enforcement of taboos, obesity issues, etc.)? Is our own food "safe"?

Considering these issues it is fair to say that there is nothing more "political" than food. To paraphrase, politics is not just the competition over "who gets what and how much" but also about "who EATS what and how much."

There are three recommended texts but only the Schlosser will be read *in toto*:

- Schlosser, Eric, *Fast Food Nation*,
- Scroggins, Deborah, *Emma's War*,
- Lappé, Frances, et al. *World Hunger: 12 Myths*,

For each topic the syllabus lists a "folders" folder which can be found on my web page (<http://morgan.ucs.mun.ca/~skeller/index.html>). Each of these contains many newspaper and magazine articles and reports. In some cases these will contradict each other or perhaps seem humorous or even absurd. Articles are included not necessarily for authoritative views but to encourage thought; they are to be read --- or better, skimmed --- more for general ideas and conflicting views rather than for detailed specific content, specific names or data. A few additional readings, marked Xerox, can be found on reserve in QEII Library, as can some of the chapters from the assigned texts.)<sup>1</sup>

Students are expected to do all the readings in advance, i.e. for the week listed in this syllabus, -- not just for those weeks in which they write papers (see below) --- and to be prepared to actively --- and pertinently --- participate in class.

Grading: There will be no examination or major paper. Students will prepare five short papers (out of the first nine possible) on weekly topics as noted. Each paper will be worth 16 points. All students will do the last (tenth) paper and it will be worth 20 points.

Papers: Weekly papers are to be discussions of the topic<sup>2</sup>, comparing and contrasting differing views and must include the student's own thoughts. Straightforward summaries are not acceptable. Before starting your writing ask yourself why these articles have been included in a particular week's folders folder. Papers must be 1500 words or less, with separate cover sheet (Name, SN, topic, date) and must be received on my email or at my office by 5 p.m. of the days noted. No late papers for any reason. No hardcopies --- emails with paper as .doc attachment only. All work is to reflect your own thought. Plagiarism will be rewarded with a zero grade. Familiarize yourself with the rules. Write as if you are producing a short article for a publication read by your friends or family. You may include personal experience and information gleaned from other courses or previous topics and lectures in this course. Make it interesting!

<sup>1</sup> During the semester the instructor may add up-to-date content to the folder folders. In other words, students who download content early should check before each week's reading assignment to insure they have the latest material.

<sup>2</sup> Be careful to write about the topic in the assigned question!

**Week 1, week of May 9** Introduction: What will we be referring to when we use the word politics? One definition of politics. Values and interests. What do these have to do with food? Human nature? Is the problem actually just too many mouths and too little food?

Readings: Deutsch, pp. 3-47 (Xerox) skim

Check out:

[http://www.salon.com/food/feature/2010/06/10/food\\_propaganda/slideshow.html#](http://www.salon.com/food/feature/2010/06/10/food_propaganda/slideshow.html#)

Listen: [http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/news/2009/05/090528\\_slavery\\_wt\\_sl.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/news/2009/05/090528_slavery_wt_sl.shtml)

Folder 1 (Food for Thought - Values) Read folders for common threads, not for details.

Folder 1a (Inequality) Read folders for common threads, not for details.

**Week 2, week of May 16** "Don't eat that, or else...!" "Oh, yeah? What are you going to do about it?" Taboos, vegetarianism, animal rights, Jains, cannibalism. In all (?) societies there are things that are "just not done" by "good people" or "us" --- if the two can be distinguished. In many cases, whether because of human nature or a diverse population some feel these restrictions must be enforced while others feel they should be resisted. Why? How?

Readings: Folder 2: Taboos

**PAPER 1 DUE Friday May 13** **Waddayamean "political"?** (n.b. this paper has to do with folders 1 and 1a)

**Week 3, week of May 23** **History, geopolitics, smuggling, and how food crops "move"...** We --- and a surprisingly large number of people in the world --- eat food our grandparents never heard of. What's more, many of the vital ingredients in "national cuisines" are not native to the country or region in question. How do foods "move"? Is there a political dimension? Political consequences? Food and demographics, invasive species.

Readings: Schlosser: pp. 13-25, 59-75

Folder 3: Migration

**PAPER 2** **DUE Friday May 27** **"Where did that come from?" "You don't expect us to eat that, do you? It was brought by..."** (n.b., this paper covers weeks 2 and 3)

**Week 4, week of May 30** **Land tenure and politics.** Who grows the food: how and under what conditions? Does this have anything to do with the "authoritative allocation of values"? What is "land reform". How does politics relate to land tenure?

Readings: Schlosser: pp. 133-166

Folder 4: Tenure

video: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/panorama/hi/front\\_page/newsid\\_8584000/8584847.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/panorama/hi/front_page/newsid_8584000/8584847.stm)

**PAPER 3 DUE Friday June 3** **Geopolitics, land tenure and food: How diets and livelihoods are affected by "big" political issues**

**Week 5, week of June 6** **Food security...** Oh my, now we are in deep water... or should I say, in the soup? An overused (and under-understood) concept. International dimensions: the role of the UN agencies and NGOs

Readings: Folder 5: Food Security

audio; [http://news.bbc.co.uk/panorama/hi/front\\_page/newsid\\_8584000/8584847.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/panorama/hi/front_page/newsid_8584000/8584847.stm)

Optional: Lappé, et. al. *World Hunger: Twelve Myths* pp. 8-40

**PAPER 4, Due Friday June 10 “Is there really an elephant in there with those blind men?”**

**Week 6, week of June 13 Food insecurity.** What happens when things go wrong? What sort of things go wrong? Famines, emergencies, disasters, wars. “Can politics have anything to do with *this*?” Is this “the perfect storm”?

Readings: Folder 6. Food Insecurity

**June 20-22 Midterm break – but you still have to PLAY THE INTERACTIVE GAME “FOOD FORCE” -- Download from <http://www.wfp.org/how-to-help/individuals/food-force>**

**Week 7, week of June 20 When things go wrong can anything be done?** The role of food aid in politics of the donor nations, recipient nations, the local level and beneficiaries: Distribution and politics, food-for-work.

Readings: Scroggins: pp. 79-125

Folder 7: What can be done?

Optional: Lappé, et. al. *World Hunger: Twelve Myths* pp. 58-108

**PAPER 5 DUE FRIDAY JUNE 24 How do things “go bad” and can anything be done? Have we learned anything ... and did you learn anything from the game? game?)**

**Week 8 week of June 27 GM food, the debate.** “How come the US is once again opposed by almost every other country?” Film: *The Future of Food*

Readings: browse the Monsanto website:

Folder 08: GM Food

**PAPER 6 DUE FRIDAY JULY 1 GM food fights: Is it too late to fight and what’s all the fuss about anyway?**

**Week 9, week of July 4 Globalization:** Agribusiness, globalization, imperialism, neo-colonialism. FILM: *Food, Inc.*

Readings: Folder 09

Pollan: “The Futures of Food” (Folder 09a)

**PAPER 7 DUE FRIDAY JULY 8 “What’s all the fuss about?” Cut that forest down, dam up those rivers. I want my burger now (and cheap)!”**

**Week 10, week of July 11 Some consequences of “life styles” and diets.** Politics, food, the environment, global warming, species extinction. Obesity, the “blame game”... is this a political issue? Film: *Supersize Me*

Readings: Schlosser: pp. 239-243

<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/6498304/>

Folder 10: Lifestyles and consequences

Suggested: Leith, William: *The Hungry Years; Confessions of a Food Addict*

**PAPER 8 DUE FRIDAY July 15 Is it a big bigness problem? --- and if so, whose problem is it?**

**Week 11, week of July 18 You really think you're safe? Can we eat that?, Should we eat that?"** Is it more dangerous to produce the food or to eat it? Who's looking out for us? Safety, organic foods, FDA, Mad Cow, Avian Flu.

Readings: Schlosser: pp. 169-222, 271-288

Folder 11: Safety

Suggested; Wilson, Bee; *Swindled: The Dark History of Food Fraud, from Poisoned Candy to Counterfeit Coffee*

**PAPER 9 DUE FRIDAY JULY 22 "Eat more; it's good for you!" Really? (You may include a discussion of local inspection and protection provisions).**

**Week 12, week of July 25 The Environment, species extinction, etc.**

Readings: Folder 12: The environment

From "The Tragedy of the Commons" (Xerox)

Environment articles (Xerox)

**Paper 10 DUE FRIDAY July 29 Is food political? Is there any hope? n.b. This paper is mandatory!**

**Week 13, week of August 1 Unfinished business: The future ... and the present:** "What's all that fuss about? Cancun, Miami, London, Athens, what are they protesting?" Can democratic (and international) politics deal with (cope with) sticky issues? Are legislation and regulation and treaties the solutions to food-related problems? The US and other nations' efforts. NAFTA, CAFTA. Film: *Fast Food Nation* (time permitting)