

Agroecology 702: THE MULTIFUNCTIONALITY OF AGRICULTURE
CES/Soc 650: THE SOCIOLOGY OF AGRICULTURE

Michael M. Bell, instructor
University of Wisconsin-Madison
Spring, 2016

T Th 2:30 to 3:45, Moore 462



The Line Storm, John Stuart Curry, 1935

What is agriculture? “The science, art, or practice of cultivating the soil, producing crops, and raising livestock and in varying degrees the preparation and marketing of the resulting products,” as the Merriam-Webster dictionary has it?

Sure, says the agroecologist, but it is also way, way more than that. Agriculture is something that people do. It is thus inherently a social process, with social purposes and consequences. But as well, it is a social process that is utterly dependent upon successful ecological relations.

In this course, we explore this “way, way more” of agriculture, developing a vision of it as a human and social activity for which we have many diverse expectations, and an activity that has to be understood with respect to it the constraints and opportunities of social and ecological context. We explore, too, the political and organizational challenges of this contextualized diversity for the cultivation of a more beneficent agriculture.

This course is one component of the two-course core sequence of the Agroecology Masters Program. The other component, Agroecology 701, places emphasis on the natural science side of agriculture’s contextualized diversity. Here we focus on its social dynamics. The course is open to all interested graduate students, and is required for all students in the Agroecology Masters Program. The course can also be taken by advanced undergraduates as a “meets with” CES/Soc 650, The Sociology of Agriculture.

The course will also emphasize the importance of publicly relevant scholarship in agroecology, and will include frequent class exercises and exemplars to develop student skills in agroecological communication.

Student Evaluation

Your grade for this course will be based on the following: a weekly intellectual journal or “muddle” (40%), class participation (30%), and a work of public scholarship (30%).

A Note on Intellectual Journals

The point of the weekly intellectual journal is to give you a chance to develop your own views on the readings and lectures, to communicate those views to the class, to demonstrate your command of what we’ve read thus far, and to keep you up-to-date with the material in the course. The format is simple: Write a critical appraisal of around 250-350 words (longer is just fine; shorter is not) of some particular theme in the previous week’s readings and lecture, and post the result to your *muddle* (see below) ideally by 5pm Friday but absolutely by **5pm Saturday**, to the course blog on learn@uw and directly to me via email. It is important to develop one theme or argument, rather than a scatter of observations. Also, it is important to *document* your theme or argument and to explain your *reasoning*, rather than offering opinion. You are expected to prepare **ten** muddles over the course of the semester.

A Note on Muddles

Each “muddle” will be a group of 3 or 4 students, who dialogue together at the start of every class. On Tuesdays, muddle members are expected to read each other’s intellectual journal entries before class on Tuesday, offer a comment or two on the course blog, and to “muddle through” them together at the start of class. Then each muddle will bring a few ideas for discussion forward to the entire class. On Thursdays, each muddle will have its own individual reading, and will begin class by discussing it together and then bringing forward its key ideas to the entire class. Each week, a different muddle member in turn will be the group’s rapporteur, coordinating the muddle discussions and doing the reporting back to the full class. We will periodically re-organize into new muddle groups over the course of the semester.

A Note on the Readings

For each week there will be one or two common readings for the entire class to read, and an individual reading for each muddle group to read on its own, as well as a public communication exemplar. On Tuesdays, we will discuss the common readings. On Thursdays, each muddle group will report back on the key themes of its individual reading, and we will also discuss the public communication exemplar.

A Note on Class Participation

Your grade for discussion participation will not be a measure of how loud you were, or of how often you spoke. Rather, it will reflect the extent to which you were “there.” I will evaluate your “thereness” based on my subjective assessment of your engagement, including the quality of your listening, in muddles and class discussions. If things don’t seem to me to be going well for you in this area, I will let you know.

A Note on the Work of Public Scholarship

Each student will prepare a work of public scholarship, either visual or textual or both, in the area of the social dimensions of agroecology – a communication piece that is scientifically informed and documented but oriented toward a public audience, rather than a professional or specialist one. The work must be prepared with a specific communication venue in mind, including the internet. I assume that most students will choose a textual project, but video or a video component is also welcome. Textual works should be in the

range of 2-3,000 words, and videos in the range of 3-5 minutes. Collaborative projects welcome!

A Note on the Readings

Course readings will be made available electronically on the course website:

<http://www.michaelmbell.net/agroecology-702/home.html>.

A Note on the Weekly Rhythm of the Course

The normal flow of the week will be as follows:

Monday: Read the coming week's readings, and read your muddle mate's journal entries about last week's coursework, if you haven't already.

Tuesday: Muddle groups meet and discuss each other's journal entries on the previous week's learning (15 minutes). Muddles bring an least one idea forward to the whole group for discussion (15 minutes). Class discussion of the new week's common readings (45 minutes).

Wednesday: If you like, make any revisions you think necessary in light of the feedback from your muddle mates, and re-submit your journal entry to Mike by midnight.

Thursday: Muddle groups meet and discuss their group's individual reading (15 minutes). Muddle groups make short presentations to the full class on the key ideas in their group's individual reading, and respond to questions (30 minutes). Discussion of the public communication exemplar (15 minutes). Mini-lecture from Mike, setting the context for the following week's themes (15 minutes).

Friday: Draft journal entry on this week's topic (not on the new readings for next week), and submit it to your muddle mates by 5pm, with a cc to Mike. If your time got away from you, or your muse didn't visit, take until Saturday at 5pm to submit it.

COURSE SCHEDULE

WEEK 1 (1/19, 1/21): Introduction

Key topics: multifunctionality, sustainability, public goods

WEEK 2 (1/26, 1/28): Agroecology and Contextual Thinking

Key topics: contextuality, agroecological theory, varieties of agroecology

PROCESSES OF MULTIFUNCTIONALITY

WEEK 3 (2/2, 2/4): Valuing Agriculture

Key topics: externalities, markets, contingent valuation, Jevons paradox, non-market values

WEEK 4 (2/9, 2/11): Cultures of Agriculture

Key topics: agrarianism, localism, social heritage, political ideologies

WEEK 5 (2/16, 2/18): The Social Organization of Agriculture

Key topics: community, family, gender, labor

WEEK 6 (2/23, 2/25): Identity and Agriculture

Key topics: social self, status, motivation, legitimacy

WEEK 7 (3/2, 3/4): Governing Agriculture

Key topics: power, regulation, standardization, democratization,

WEEK 8 (3/9, 3/11): Changing Agriculture

Key topics: participation, mobilization, networks, dialogue

WEEK 9 (3/16, 3/18): First Synthesis

Key topics: workshopping an outline of your public scholarship project

No assigned reading.

SPRING BREAK WEEK!!!!

EXPECTATIONS OF MULTIFUNCTIONALITY

WEEK 10 (3/29, 3/31): Ecosystem Services

Key topics: economic approaches, non-economic approaches, critiques

WEEK 11 (4/5, 4/7): Cheap Food

Key topics: “feeding the world,” organics, conventionalization, bifurcation, alternatives

WEEK 12 (4/12, 4/14): Poverty and Hunger Alleviation

Key topics: food security, food sovereignty, the double burden, international dimensions

WEEK 13 (4/19, 4/21): Farm and Community Viability

Key topics: local food, farm survival, values chains, civic agriculture, farm scale and community

WEEK 14 (4/26, 4/28): Justice

Key topics: minority farmers, gender, land tenure, agricultural workers

WEEK 15 (5/3, 5/5): Second Synthesis

Key topics: workshopping a draft of your public scholarship project

May 11th: Public Scholarship Project Due