GEOG 446
AGRICULTURE AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Course Description

For the past ten thousand years, agriculture has been the primary driver in both the rise and fall of human civilizations. Today, agriculture remains the foundation of nearly all human societies, shaping in very fundamental ways both our environment and our economic, political, and cultural systems. In the past half century we have experienced very sudden and sweeping changes to the way we practice agriculture, due primarily to rapid advances in key areas of science and technology. Unfortunately, while our agricultural system is rapidly evolving, our understanding of how these changes are affecting both society and the environment struggles to keep up.

This course examines the contemporary dynamics of global agriculture and food production systems in order to build a more robust understanding of the social, economic, and environmental benefits and problems associated with our current global food regime. Topics to be explored in this course include local and global agro-food systems, political ecology of food, global commodity chains, green & blue revolutions, cultural patterns of consumption, agricultural biotechnologies, agribusiness, food security, agriculture related social movements, biofuels, and of course the environmental impacts of agriculture.

Seminars will combine weekly lectures with group work and discussion. Students will be expected to voice opinions and engage in critical and informed debate on the course material. Course texts will be supplemented with weekly readings available online or from the library. This course also draws upon a range of video and other media to explore the interactions between agriculture and the environment.

Required Course Textbooks

Ronald Wright. A Short History of Progress: 2004 Massey Lecture. Anansi: Toronto, 2004. (also available as audio CDs)

Pollan, M. (2006) *The Omnivores Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals.* New York: Thompson Gale Press.

We will cover the above readings in the first three weeks of class. A lecture and reading schedule for the remainder of the term will be provided in the second week of class. Weekly readings, handouts, and lecture materials will be given out in class, placed on reserve in the library, and/or posted on the course website.

Assessment

Grades in the course are based on a term paper, seminar work, a series of (one page) summary and critiques of assigned readings, and a final take-home. Final grades are calculated according to a weighted average of the exam, papers and seminars as follows:

Assessment	**% of Final Grade**
Seminar participation/presentation/debate	20%
Research Paper	30%
Summary and Critiques	30%
Final Take-home Exam	20%