

Syllabus – Fall 2011

AGROECOLOGY 701 FARM AS SOCIO-ENVIRONMENTAL ENDEAVOR

Tues-Thurs 2:30-3:45, Rm. 357 Soils Bldg.

## **Course Objectives**

- 1. Explore ways of understanding those who are playing-out their agricultural ambitions.
- 2. Explore the major contexts in which farming endeavors must operate.
- 3. Consider current agricultural sustainability arguments.
- 4. In the end: To begin gathering the right questions to ask when confronted with understanding how a farming endeavor holds together—the necessary first step in facilitating change.

## **Broad Course Organization**

- Weeks 1-4: Reading narratives of farming and exploring ontoepistemological approaches
- Weeks 5-11: Exploring contexts of farming endeavors
- Weeks 12-13: Agricultural sustainability
- Weeks 14-15: Sharing stories

## **Evaluation**

- 10% Participation (both contributing and listening) in discussions and field activities
- 30% Learning Journals thoughtful and timely entries
- 10% Field lab efforts
- 20% Agricultural practice review (for the Agro-eCollage wiki)
- 30% Narrative of a farm-far-away

*Learning Journal:* As a way of consolidating our discussions you will write a journal that I will review on three occasions during the semester **(9/29, 10/25, 12/8)**. You may write daily, weekly, or a single entry for each submission. Journals should convey three things:

- a summary of WHAT we've been discussing in class, especially what is new to you,
- a reflection on SO WHAT? in which you offer some thoughts on the implications of this material for your understanding of the human agricultural endeavor, and
- NOW WHAT? are you going to do as a result, say in researching and writing class assignments, your thesis or project work, or future course work.

It is probably easiest for both of us if your journal contains these sections explicitly, but if you find them too constraining do experiment.

*Field Labs:* We will visit 3 farms on Saturdays during the semester. Dates set at this point are Sept 10, Oct 1, and Oct 15, leaving at 8:30 and returning no later than 5:00. Prior to each trip you will work in teams to gather some background on relevant contexts, to share during our visit; selected contexts vary by site, but may include:

- water, soil, and air
- biota
- agricultural products
- household
- community

Each team will work on a question for others members of the class to address in Learning Journal entries.

Each team will tell a story of the farm from their assigned perspective based on the day of field work and follow-up research, drawing on the holon framework.

Agricultural Practice Review: Hey, what's a class without a term paper? Here you will write an in-depth and up-to-date review of an important farm-level agricultural practice (technological or social). You will contribute to the Agroecology program's wiki, Agro-eCollage (agroecology.wisc.edu/wiki/ - login information to follow). The focus and scope of your review will require some discussion and negotiation with the instructor, and you should have this settled no later than 9/29. The final product should be about 2000 words plus citations to recent scholarly literature, properly incorporated into the wiki by Nov 22. The topic of your review could be relevant to your "Narrative of a farm-far-away" assignment.

Narrative of a Farm-Far-Away: This is not a term paper! Here we would like you to blend the holon agroecology framework with scholarship and imagination to tell the story of farming endeavor somewhere that you have never been. Your work must involve people with names, histories, and agricultural capabilities (sensu Sen), in a place with attendant contexts. Many students experience discomfort when asked to "make things up," but all of us do it all the time—every narrative we tell requires some assumptions, some filling in the odd detail. This exercise reminds of this, and challenges us to dig for information to build the highest-quality narrative possible without leaving Madison. With luck and planning your "Practice Review" should contribute to the verisimilitude of your narrative. You will share this with the class in the form of a "digital story" of about 5 minutes length (see <a href="https://academictech.doit.wisc.edu/ideas/digitalstorytelling">https://academictech.doit.wisc.edu/ideas/digitalstorytelling</a>) during the last weeks of the semester and complete a written narrative of a few thousand words by **Dec** 19. We'll discuss digital storytelling in more detail later.