

Eating Your Ecology: Food Writing & Environmentalism

Professor Ethan Mannon

Course Description:

This course aims to bring you closer to your food—intellectually, literally, and ecologically. Although the relationship between humans and our nourishment has provided food for thought for hundreds of years, the last decade has witnessed an explosion of “food writing” that has generated a wide range of responses. Indeed, as readers and eaters have taken steps to learn more about their food, they have generated many words describing their eating habits, including *Organic*, *Free-Range*, *Locavore*, and *Fermento*. In this course, we will read several examples of contemporary texts that have helped to popularize the need and the techniques for paying more attention to what we put into our bodies, as well as some older texts that establish a centuries-old tradition of American Food Writing. Our reading will allow us to consider such questions as: What, exactly, are we eating? Where does it come from? What are the environmental aspects of our food culture? What is the history of food and eating in America? How do our eating habits map onto other aspects of life, including urbanism, corporatization, and consumerism? How can we use food, and narratives about food, to look at community development, politics, spiritual enrichment, and ethics? And just what is it that farmers really *do*, anyway?

You’ll be reading a series of food narratives and food exposés intended to be both informative and entertaining. None of these books are strictly scientific—that is, behind each of our readings there is a humanist, thinking in philosophical and cultural terms. Together, we’ll discuss those underlying philosophies, their origins, and how they might come to effect change in our society. Then, we’ll add our own perspectives to the conversation.

There will be multiple **experiential** aspects of this class. We will travel to farms and work on them. We will note the kinds of things *we* choose to eat, and will study our personal encounters with food and the people who grow it. And, perhaps best of all, we’ll share food with each other each week in class, and cook an end-of-year feast together. Good nourishment for mind and body: that’s the goal of this course.

Required Texts* and Necessary Materials:

Willa Cather. *O Pioneers!*. ISBN: 0140187758.

Helen and Scott Nearing. *The Good Life*. ISBN: 0805209700.

Wendell Berry. *Remembering: A Novel*. ISBN: 1582434158.

Michael Pollan. *Cooked: A Natural History of Transformation*. ISBN: 1846148030.

Kristin Kimball. *The Dirty Life: A Memoir of Farming, Food, and Love*. ISBN: 1416551611.

Will Allen. *The Good Food Revolution*. ISBN: 1592407609.

*The course texts will be supplemented by PDF materials from a variety of authors including Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, Henry David Thoreau, bell hooks, Wes Jackson, Gary Paul Nabhan, Joel Salatin, Stanley Crawford, and Colin Beavan. Because class discussion will involve detailed discussions of certain passages, you will be required to bring all PDF materials to class.

This course requires some additional, uncommon items. You will all need some warm clothes and footwear suitable for our farm trips. Also, you should obtain a reusable bowl, mug, or plate and utensils for the food we’ll share each week. Camping gear would work well.

Calendar of Readings, Trips and Assignments, Spring 2014

Note: All readings, due dates, and trips are subject to change due to weather or the discretion of the instructor(s).

- Week 1, January 16: Syllabus
PDF: Gary Paul Nabhan, *Coming Home to Eat*: 42-54
PDF: Wes Jackson, *Consulting the Genius of the Place*: 73-84
- Week 2, January 23: PDF: Benjamin Franklin, from *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*
PDF: Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*: 216-21
PDF: Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*: 104-12, 135-49
**FOOD JOURNAL DUE
- Week 3, January 30: Willa Cather, *O Pioneers!*
PDF: from Frieda Knobloch, *The Culture of Wilderness*
**FIRST FILM RESPONSE DUE
- Week 4, February 6: Willa Cather, *O Pioneers!*: Finish
PDF: Susan Meyer, "Sanitary Piggeries and Chaste Chickens: Willa Cather and the Pure Food Movement"
- Week 5, February 13: Michael Pollan, *Cooked*: Introduction and Part II
**BLOG REPORT DUE
- Week 6, February 20: Michael Pollan, *Cooked*: Part IV and Afterword
**BLOG PRESENTATIONS 4:00 → talk by Sister Noella
- Week 7, February 27: Helen and Scott Nearing, *The Good Life*: 3-53, 90-162, 228-55, 368-92
**BLOG PRESENTATIONS
- *Saturday, March 1: Trip to Blue Rooster Farms
- Week 8, March 6: Wendell Berry, *Remembering*:
PDF: Wendell Berry: "The Pleasures of Eating"
**BLOG PRESENTATIONS
- Week 9, March 13: SPRING BREAK
- Week 10, March 20: Wendell Berry, *Remembering*: Finish
PDF: Daniel J. Phillipon, "Sustainability & the Humanities: An Extensive Pleasure"
- Week 11, March 27: PDF: Stanley Crawford, *A Garlic Testament*: 38-48, 114-34, 180-85
PDF: Joel Salatin, *The Sheer Ecstasy of Being a Lunatic Farmer*: 102-32, 214-50
- Week 12, April 3: Kristin Kimball, *The Dirty Life*: Parts I and II (pgs 1-124)
- *Saturday, & Sunday, April 5 and 6: Trip to Mystic Springs Farm
- Week 13, April 10: Kristin Kimball, *The Dirty Life*: Finish
- Week 14, April 17: Will Allen, *The Good Food Revolution*
- *Saturday, April 19: Trip to Mountainside Homestead
- Week 15, April 24: Will Allen, *The Good Food Revolution*: Finish
PDF: bell hooks, "Touching the Earth"
- Week 16, May 1: Class Dinner @ Greenmore Gardens
PDF: Colin Beavan, *No Impact Man*: 3-19; 107-40
**ESSAY DUE

For Further Reading: A Brief Food Ecology Bibliography

On Agriculture and Food:

- King, F. H. *Farmers of Forty Centuries: or, Permanent Agriculture in China, Korea, and Japan*. 1911.
- Howard, Albert, Sir. *An Agricultural Testament*. 1940.
- Bromfield, Louis. *Malabar Farm*. 1948.
- Hightower, Jim. *Hard Tomatoes, Hard Times: The Failure of the Land Grant College Complex*. 1972.
- Berry, Wendell. *The Unsettling of America* 1977.
- Jackson, Wes. *New Roots for Agriculture*. 1980.
- Masumoto, David. *Epitaph for a Peach*. 1995.
- Logsdon, Gene. *All Flesh is Grass: The Pleasures and Promises of Pasture Farming*. 2004.
- . *Holy Shit: Managing Manure to Save Mankind*. 2010.

On Rural Living and Farming:

- MacDonald, Betty. *The Egg and I*. 1945.
- Beston, Henry. *The Northern Farm*. 1948.
- Hubbell, Sue. *A Country Year*. 1986.
- Klinkenborg, Verlyn. *The Rural Life*. 2003.
- Crowe, Thomas Raine. *Zoro's Field*. 2006.
- Kingsolver, Barbara. *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*. 2007.
- Perry, Michael. *Coop: A Family, a Farm, and the Pursuit of One Good Egg*. 2010.
- Mather, Robin. *The Feast Nearby*. 2011.
- Timmermeister, Kurt. *Growing a Farmer*. 2011.

On Urban Farming and Food Deserts:

- Reynolds, Richard. *On Guerilla Gardening*. 2008.
- Winne, Mark. *Closing the Food Gap*. 2008.
- Carpenter, Novella. *Farm City: The Education of an Urban Farmer*. 2009.
- Warren, Spring. *The Quarter-Acre Farm*. 2011.
- McMillan, Tracie. *The American Way of Eating: Undercover at Walmart, Applebee's, Farm Fields, and the Dinner Table*. 2012.

Some other Important, Influential, and Entertaining Reads:

- Lappe, Frances Moore. *Diet for a Small Planet*. 1971.
- Singer, Peter. *Animal Liberation*. 1975.
- Ozeki, Ruth. *My Year of Meats*. 1998.
- Schlosser, Eric. *Fast Food Nation*. 2002.
- Bourdain, Anthony. *Kitchen Confidential*. 2007.
- Smith, Alisa Dawn & J.B. MacKinnon. *The 100-Mile Diet*. 2007.
- Hamilton, Gabrielle. *Blood, Bones, and Butter*. 2011.

*PLEASE contact your professor to let him know what's missing from the list!