GEO 433 Global Economic Geographies of Agriculture and Food Systems

- Course Syllabus -

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Leigh Johnson
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GEO 433 – Global Economic Geographies of Agriculture and Food Systems

Course organization

Class Meetings
Wednesdays 12.15-2.45 pm, Room: TBA

OLAT Campus Course
The course is managed via our E-learning platform OLAT:
(a link will be added when the campus course is activated in early February)

Course instructors
Christian Berndt Office hours (L48): Mondays 10:00-11:00 or by appointment
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Leigh Johnson Office hours (L54): Tuesdays 13:30-14:30 or by appointment
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Johanna Herrigel Office hours (L52): Tuesdays 14:00-15:30 or by appointment
johanna.herrigel@geo.uzh.ch

Scope and aims

Scope
This course is offered as a Vertiefungsmodul in the MSc program in Geography and is additionally available as an option for students from other Master programs. Being a 6-credit course, it is expected to require a total of approximately 180 hours work by students.

Aims
This seminar focuses on the role of agriculture in attempts to stimulate economic development in the global south. Applying theoretical approaches that provide alternatives to the economic mainstream, we will engage with the revival of smallholder farming in pro-poor development programs, the global commodity boom and its implications for the global south, and the consequences of the growing demand for fresh fruits and vegetables in the north for selected southern countries. Regionally, our case studies will be selected from Latin America and Africa.

Learning outcomes
On completion of this course, successful participants will...
...have developed an overview of contemporary academic literature and concepts pertaining to global food and agricultural systems.
...be able to critically discuss specific phenomena of globalization, commodification, and industrialization of agriculture using concepts and approaches from heterodox economic geography.
have acquired and practiced crucial academic skills such as writing, moderating, and debating.

This course aims at stimulating critical thinking in the analysis of global agriculture and food systems through reflective practice and, in doing so, to make students aware of their own assumptions and values and the consequences of these. Indeed, we are exposed to a sea of information, ideas, and opinions about how to “feed the world”. Critical thinking allows us to analyze and evaluate the validity and assumptions of these positions, and develop our own opinions.

Expectations and assessments

This course will be run in a seminar format. As readings and discussions form the basis of the learning experience at MA level, students are expected to complete the indicated readings prior to each seminar and be prepared to explain and discuss them in class.

Weekly reading of key texts

Each student is expected to thoroughly prepare herself/himself for the individual seminar sessions by reading the indicated texts for the corresponding week. You should expect a weekly assignment of two texts of approximately 20 pages each. Every week, you are required to post at least two questions, comments, or critiques you have formulated while reading the texts to the course OLAT forum by 20:00 Tuesday evening.

Group work

During the weekly course, small groups will discuss key issues of the readings, prepare answers to questions formulated by the lecturers and attempt to solve uncertainties that may have emerged while reading the texts.

Weekly facilitation

Each week a student will be responsible for facilitating class discussion for roughly 45 minutes. The student is responsible for taking ownership of the texts, leading discussion of the texts, and making links to current developments and debates in the news media. We will introduce you to a number of news databases, blogs, and other resources that will assist you in making these links. You are not required to post to the OLAT forum on the week you facilitate.

Assessment

Each student will be assessed in a three-fold way, consisting of a take-home exam* at the end of the seminar (60% of final mark), the above-mentioned facilitation task (25% of final mark), and active class participation, including on the OLAT forum (15% of final mark).

*The take-home exam will consist of a choice between 3 essay questions, each of which will touch on material and themes from throughout the course.
Useful references, blogs, new sources, and the like

“Mainstream” sources:

- Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO) - Statistics: http://www.fao.org/economic/ess/ (e.g. statistical yearbooks) http://faostat.fao.org/ (comprehensive trade and production data)
- Forum for Agricultural Risk Management in Development (FARMD) (Supported by World Bank): www.agriskmanagementforum.org
- Africa Progress Panel (for background on growth and poverty in Africa): www.africaprogesspanel.org

Progressive/rights-oriented sources:

- Future Agricultures Consortium: www.future-agricultures.org (for a vast array of reports and working papers on topics from contract farming, to gender, to foreign investment, to climate change)
- Institute for Food and Development Policy (aka Food First): http://foodfirst.org/publications/ (see especially the "Backgrounder" series)
- Institute for Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies (@ University of Western Cape, South Africa): http://www.plaas.org.za/blog
- Agriarian Justice Cluster of the Transnational Institute: http://www.tni.org/work-area/agrarian-justice
- International Land Coalition: www.landcoalition.org (reports and monitoring of land rights, governance, and common property) and the ILC YouTube channel with dozens of videos international activists: https://www.youtube.com/user/landcoalition/videos

General geography reference databases, dictionaries, encyclopedias:

- http://www.sage-ereference.com/
- http://www.blackwellreference.com/subscriber/uid=1223/
- http://www.oxfordreference.com
# Program summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Lecturer(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>18.02</td>
<td>Global agrarian transformations</td>
<td>LJ &amp; JH</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>25.02</td>
<td>Globalized agricultural commodity chains</td>
<td>JH</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>04.03</td>
<td>Agriculture and ethical standards (Guest Lecture Prof. Sarah Besky, University of Michigan)</td>
<td>LJ</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>11.03</td>
<td>Agricultural labor</td>
<td>CB</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>18.03</td>
<td>Agriculture in and outside capitalism?</td>
<td>LJ</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>25.03</td>
<td>Feeding the world? Food scarcity, food security, food sovereignty</td>
<td>LJ</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>01.04</td>
<td>Risk management, household vulnerability, and climate change</td>
<td>LJ</td>
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<td></td>
<td>08.04</td>
<td>SPRING BREAK</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>15.04</td>
<td>Making farmers productive? Intensification and behavioral interventions</td>
<td>CB</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>22.04</td>
<td>Value chain agriculture: Making markets for the poor (AAG)</td>
<td>JH</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>29.04</td>
<td>“Land grabbing”/The global land rush</td>
<td>JH &amp; LJ</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>06.05</td>
<td>Financialization of agriculture (Guest Lecture Dr. Stefan Ouma, Goethe University Frankfurt)</td>
<td>CB</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>13.05</td>
<td>Finance, flex crops, and land grabbing: Case study of Argentina</td>
<td>CB</td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>20.05</td>
<td>Alternative Food Networks - challenging globalized agro-commodity chains?</td>
<td>JH</td>
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<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>27.05</td>
<td>Debate and synthesis</td>
<td>all</td>
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Readings

18.02. Course organization and Introduction: Global Agrarian Transformations (LJ & JH)

25.02. Globalized agricultural commodity chains and regulation through private standards (JH)

04.03. Agriculture and ethical standards
(Guest Lecture Prof. Sarah Besky, University of Michigan)

11.03 Agricultural labor (CB)

plus video material:
- Film FRONTLINE World California The Immigration Dilemma PBS
- Bitter Harvest

18.03. Agriculture in and outside capitalism: “The agrarian question” and food sovereignty (LJ)
- Brookfield, H. 2008 “Family farms are still around: Time to invert the old agrarian question” *Geography Compass* (2:1) 108-126
- Isakson, R. (2009) “No hay ganacia en la milpa”: the agrarian question, food sovereignty, and the on-farm conservation of agrobiodiversity in the Guatemalan
25.03. Feeding the world? Food scarcity and food security (LJ)
(W6)

01.04. Vulnerability, risk, and climate change (LJ)
(W7)

08.04. UZH SPRING BREAK

15.04. Making farmers productive? Intensification and behavioral interventions (CB)
(W8)

22.04. Value chain agriculture: Making markets for the poor (JH)
(W9)

29.04. “Land grabbing”/The global land rush (JH & LJ)
(W10)
– Bodenatlas 2015: „Die Grosse Landgier“ (pp 26-27)
Financialization of agriculture

(Guest Lecture Dr. Stefan Ouma, Goethe University Frankfurt) (CB)

- Ouma, S. The Entangled Geographies of Financial Economization: Opening the Black Box of Finance-Gone-Farming (article under review at Economy and Society) pp 1-23.

Zurich Human Geography Colloquium talk by Prof. Tania Li, “Land’s End: Capitalist Relations on an Indigenous Frontier”
(Your attendance is strongly encouraged as the topic parallels this course!)

Finance, flex crops, and land grabbing: Case study of Argentina (CB)


Alternative Food Networks - challenging globalized agro-commodity chains? (JH)


Debate and Synthesis (All)