

AGRI/PHIL 330 Agricultural Ethics Syllabus

January 22, 2013

General Course Information

Instructors

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Lecture Periods

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 12:30-1:45, 9 Eddy

General Course Objectives

Agriculture is the most important human activity. It makes life possible. Agriculture is the source of our food and most of our fiber and provides employment for many of the world's people. It is the most important and largest human interaction with the environment. Because of its importance, size, and distribution, agriculture unavoidably interacts with social, political, economic, and all other realms of human activity.

Agricultural education typically emphasizes learning to do things that increase food and fiber production. This course will examine the values underlying agriculture's productive practices. Students will be encouraged to think about the values implicit in agricultural practices and reasons supporting present agricultural practices and practices that may replace them in the future.

Agriculture is under attack from many quarters because it is no longer uniformly regarded as serving the public interest. Agricultural practitioners and many critics of agriculture typically lack knowledge of their ethical foundations and are often unable to articulate and defend their values. This course is designed to bring clarity to the debate surrounding some agricultural issues and explore their ethical dimensions

The course will enable identification of value conflicts and provide a framework for discussing them. Students should develop the ability to understand their own views as well as opposing views of ethical issues and be able to articulate and defend various views and the values they represent. Students who complete the course successfully should be able to define and interpret basic concepts in ethics and ethical decision making and be able to use these concepts in discussions of contemporary agricultural issues.

Specific Course Objectives

- To learn basic concepts in ethics and ethical decision making.
- To use ethics concepts in analyzing, evaluating, and discussing contemporary issues in agriculture and the food system.

Instructional Methods

Students will prepare for class by reading assigned articles and other materials, thinking about the issues raised, and preparing to discuss and ask questions related to the readings. Class periods will include some lectures, but will be more heavily devoted to discussion. Students will gain skills of analysis and evaluation of arguments.

Short Writing Assignments, Graded Discussions, and Exams

Many weeks of the semester will include a short written assignment (one paragraph) answering a question related to the readings. In addition, many weeks will include a graded discussion (described in detail in the course schedule). There will be a “take-home” midterm exam and a final exam that will have both “take-home” and “in-the-final-exam-period” components. Both will consist entirely or almost entirely of essay type questions. In addition, there will be an in-depth writing assignment (described below).

In-depth Writing Assignment

The in-depth writing assignment for this class is a minimum of 10 pages and involves researching and writing on a topic of a student’s choice or one suggested by the instructors. Because this is a class in Agricultural Ethics, identification and exploration of ethical issues related to the topic must be the central concern.

Paper topics will require thoughtful analysis of difficult problems. Consider answering or contesting the following quotation as a paper topic:

By the year 2050, the number of people on Earth is expected to increase to 9.2 billion from the current 6.7 billion.... What is the best way to produce enough food to feed all these people? If we continue with current farming practices, vast amounts of wilderness will be lost, millions of birds and billions of insects will die, farm workers will be at increased risk for disease, and the public will lose billions of dollars as a consequence of environmental degradation. Clearly, there must be a better way to resolve the need for increased food production with the desire to minimize its impact. (Tomorrow’s Table, Pamela Ronald and Raoul Adamchak, Oxford University Press: 2008, p. ix)

Paper topics will have an orientation toward solving future problems confronting agriculture. Consider how social trends affect agriculture. The epidemic of obesity in the United States and other countries means that people now die from having too much food as well as too little. Requiring restaurants to post calories on menus and restricting the size of beverages (New York City) presages a new chapter for producers. How should agriculture respond to changing social policy and consumer preferences? The obesity issue is a second suggestion for a paper topic. Remember, you may select your own paper topic, but all paper topics, must be approved by an instructor.

Paper Format

The first paragraph of the paper must contain an underlined thesis statement so readers immediately see the focus of the paper. The thesis or the first paragraph must clearly outline the coming issues/arguments the paper will cover. The purpose here is to organize the paper for both author and reader. A good strategy is to start with a preliminary thesis and then refine it as the paper progresses. In the process of research and writing, an author should expect to modify his or her original position.

The last paragraph must summarize what the paper has accomplished. What has the paper done? What is new here?

The paper is not a book report or a summary/description of issues. A good paper will summarize and describe only as necessary to advance a position. Description and summary must be used as tools for argument and analysis, not to fill the page requirement for a paper. Direct quotations should be used sparingly.

Another requirement for the paper is that it must consider and respond to at least 2 objections to the paper’s position. First, in separate paragraph(s), fairly state what opponents say about a position or argument the paper advances. Then, in separate paragraphs, the paper must say why such arguments are problematic or unpersuasive. This section of the paper may easily occupy about 3-4 pages.

The research for the paper must demonstrate good use of library resources. Grades increase the more authors use peer reviewed journal articles from CSU library databases, books, and similar sources. A paper mainly relying on Internet resources such as a web site from interest groups is unacceptable. A “works cited” page concludes the paper.

Critical Thinking

Critical thinking is expressed through the arguments, logic, and reasoning in the paper. On the other hand, personal attacks, question begging, false or questionable statements, etc. reflect a lack of critical thinking. A paper exhibiting strong critical thinking will provide ample support (evidence, arguments, explanations) for its thesis.

Finally, the paper shows good grammar and spelling.

All students are encouraged to discuss topic selection with Gamble or Holtzer. Topics, a preliminary thesis statement, and a 2-4 sentence initial description of the specific ethical questions that are relevant to the topic area must be submitted via email to Gamble or Holtzer no later than February 14th (earlier is better). Topics must be approved by one of the instructors.

The paper is due via email before class on Thursday, March 28th with a hard copy provided in class on March 28th. One of the instructors will read and comment on it. The instructor also will provide the student with a number of follow-up questions related to the paper. The answers to these questions are due (for additional credit) via email before class on Tuesday, April 23rd with a hard copy provided in class on April 23rd (together with a copy of the paper as returned to the student).

Summary of Writing Assignment Deadlines

Topic selection and approval	No later than February 14 th
Completed paper	March 28 th
Response to follow-up questions	April 23 rd

Grading

Grade Component	Approximate Percentage of Overall Course grade
1. Short writing assignments, and graded discussions	25%
2. Midterm exam	15%
3. Final exam	25%
4. In-depth writing assignment (paper)	25%
5. Response to questions related to paper	10%
Total	100%

Assigned Readings

There is no required text for the course. However, there are a number of assigned readings and media presentations. They are available on RamCT. In addition, there are many good references covering ethics topics that students may find useful. One example is: James Rachels and Stuart Rachels. 2010. *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*. 6th Edition. McGraw Hill. 203 pp.

Academic Integrity

Cheating on examinations and plagiarism in papers is not acceptable and will result in a grade of zero for the assignment. Simply stated, plagiarism is the use of another's thoughts or words as if they were your own. It is dishonest use of another's work. Whenever you use a general concept, idea, quotation, fact, statistic, or illustration that is not yours, cite the source. Proper citation of sources in the paper (including internet sources) is expected. When plagiarism is suspected, papers may be checked with one of several plagiarism detection programs. The instructors of this course expect students to comply with the CSU Honor Pledge: *"I will not give, receive, or use any unauthorized assistance."*

Class Schedule

Introduction

All class reading assignments are posted on RamCT under the "Readings" button, in the column on the left of the class home page (there is no text for the class). Print readings or download them to a laptop or electronic reader so you can easily reference them in class.

During the semester, substitutions may be made for some readings. However, the time required to complete the assigned readings for the class will not be changed substantially.

Week 1 (January 22, 24)

Tuesday: Introduction

On the one hand it is easy to make the point that agriculture (our food system) is wonderful. On the other hand, that assertion is easy to question. How do we figure out where the truth lies?

What is agriculture (our food system) all about? Human health. Environmental sustainability. Producing food. Animal welfare. Profitability....

The role of ethics: Ethics considers what should be the case. It is about standards and appropriate values. What should agriculture (our food system) do? For example, our food system is tremendously successful in producing enormous amounts of food. But what are the costs of this production to our environment and to our health; and are those whose labor contributes to this production treated fairly? Eating beef, for example, has costs in climate change, water consumption, water pollution, and human health. Do we wish to maintain the status quo or should we change this system? These questions are the beginning of an ethical discussion.

Thursday: Library Database Presentation (meet at the Library)

Library staff will present an overview of best ways to access library resources relevant to the long writing assignment for this class. There will be a short assignment utilizing electronic library databases, worth 5 points. (To complete the assignment, email your response [Thomas.Holtzer@ColoState.edu] before the next class period and bring a printed, hard copy to class.)

Week 2 (January 29, 31)

Agriculture as about using environmental resources, energy, and people to produce food, fiber, and biofuels.

Tuesday: How would Aldo Leopold farm? How should we farm?

Before Class: Read

- Leopold, "The Land Ethic"
- Klinkenborg, "Did Farmers of the Past Know More Than We Do?"

Thursday:

Before Class: Read

- Hurst, "The Omnivore's Delusion: Against the Agri-intellectuals"
- Bedford, "Agri-Intellectual Reason" (A Response to Blake Hurst)

Before Class: Turn in

- a one-paragraph response to a written question you will receive via the message system on RamCT. You will get the question by 8:00 pm on Tuesday night. The purpose of the paragraph is to have you read, think, and be better prepared for Thursday's discussion. The assignment is worth 5 points. (Your response must be submitted as a MS Word file before class and as a hardcopy brought with you to class.)

The first 30 minutes of class will be an open discussion of Hurst and Bedford. Last 45 minutes will be your first **graded discussion**.

For the graded discussion, we divide the class into 4 groups of about 7 students each. Each group discusses an answer to the question(s) we pose and then reports a summary of its response to other students. Everyone in a group will usually get the same grade of 0-5 points. However, students who don't come to class or come to class unprepared will receive a lower grade.

Guidance: in answering a question in a graded class discussion, do not refer to fate, destiny, or religious beliefs. While these perspectives are sometimes used to guide decision-making, they are outside the scope, materials, and subject matter of this course. Your challenge is to demonstrate understanding of class materials and reference them in your graded discussions.

Week 3 (February 5, 7)

Agriculture as about outcomes. What should be the outcomes of agriculture?

Tuesday:

Before Class: Read

- Bentham, “Principles of Morals and Legislation”
- Nicholas Kristoff, “ Where Cows are Happy and Food is Healthy”
- Klinkenborg, “Did Farmers of the Past Know More Than We Do?”

In class:

- Viewing of selections from Michael Sandel on Bentham and cost/benefit analysis

Thursday:

Before Class: Read

- Media Planet, “Agriculture in America”
- Pollen, “Farmer in Chief”

Before Class: Turn in

- a one-paragraph response to a written question you will receive via the message system on RamCT. The details of this short writing assignment will be the same as those for the Week 2 short writing assignment (see above).

The first 30 minutes of class will be an open discussion of conflicts between Pollen and Media Planet articles. Last 45 minutes will be set aside for a **graded discussion**.

Week 4 (February 12, 14)

Agriculture (food system) as about purpose. What is the purpose of agriculture?

Tuesday:

Before Class: Read

- Thompson, “The Philosophy of Farming in America”
- Thompson “The Challenge for Agrarian Virtue”

In class:

- Viewing of selections from Michael Sandel on Aristotle

Thursday:

Before Class: Turn in

- a one-paragraph response to a written question you will receive via the message system on RamCT. The details of this short writing assignment will be the same as those for the Week 2 short writing assignment (see above).

The first 30 minutes of class will be an open discussion of Thompson’s account of farming as creating character. Last 45 minutes will be set aside for a **graded discussion**.

Week 5 (February 19,21)

Plants are the essential component of our agricultural system.

What are the impacts of the plant component of our agricultural system on natural resources and the environment? What ethical questions are raised by these impacts? Should they be reduced? What alternatives could be implemented?

How should we manage plant production? What should we plant? What should our production system look like? How should we manage the risks to plant production?

As a microcosm of these broad issues – how should we handle risks to plant production such as insects, plant pathogens, and weeds? What strategies and tactics should we use? What is the role of technologies such as pesticides?

Tuesday and Thursday:

Before Class: Read

- Lehman, “Values, Ethics, and the Use of Synthetic Pesticides in Agriculture.” Pp 347-379 (Focus on pp 371-379)

In class: Lecture and discussion

Week 6 (February 26, 28)

Is our agricultural system sustainable? What is sustainability? What are the conceptual dimensions of sustainable agriculture? Does sustainability matter from an ethics perspective? How important is it relative to other concerns? What agricultural strategies and tactics contribute to the sustainability of agriculture?

Tuesday:

Before Class: Read

- UC Davis website, <http://www.sarep.ucdavis.edu/about/def>
- USDA/SARE “What is Sustainable Agriculture?”
- Bill Gates, “We Need Productivity and Sustainability”
- Terry Stone, “Sustainability and the Needs of 2050 Agriculture: Developed and Developing World Perspectives.”

In class: Lecture and discussion

The **Midterm Exam** (take home) will be distributed in class. Completed midterms are due before class via email [Thomas.Holtzer@ColoState.edu] on March 7th. Also, bring a printed, hard copy to class on March 7th.

Thursday:

Before Class: Turn in

- a one-paragraph response to a written question you will receive via the message system on RamCT. The details of this short writing assignment will be the same as those for the Week 2 short writing assignment (see above).

The first 30 minutes of class will be an open discussion of Week 5 and Week 6 topics. Last 45 minutes will be set aside for a **graded discussion**.

Week 7 (March 5, 7)

Plant-based biofuels are an increasing component of the agricultural system. Should agriculture be used to produce fuels? What ethical issues are raised?

Tuesday:

Before Class: Read

- Rosenthal, "As Biofuel Demand Grows, So Do Guatemala's Hunger Pangs"
- Block, "Rising Food Prices? Can't Blame Ethanol"
- Thompson, "Agricultural Biofuels: Two Ethical Issues"

In class: Lecture and discussion

Thursday:

In class: Lecture and discussion

The first 30 minutes of class will be an open discussion of biofuels topics. Last 45 minutes will be set aside for a **graded discussion**.

Midterm Exams are due before class via email [Thomas.Holtzer@ColoState.edu] with a hard copy submitted in class.

Spring Break (March 12, 14)

Week 8 (March 19, 21)

Animals are part of the agricultural system.

Should we raise and eat animals? If so, how?

Tuesday:

Before Class: Read

- Foer, "I'm not the Kind of Person Who Finds Himself on a Stranger's Farm in the Middle of the Night"
- Matheny, "Utilitarianism and Animals"
- Rollin, "Annual Meeting Keynote Address: Animal Agriculture and Emerging Social Ethics for Animals"

In class: Lecture and discussion of philosophical issues raised by factory (industrial) farming of animals.

Thursday:

Before Class: Turn in

- a one-paragraph response to a written question you will receive via the message system on RamCT. The details of this short writing assignment will be the same as those for the Week 2 short writing assignment (see above).

Before Class: Read

- Kaminer, "Calling all Carnivores"
- Haynes, "The Myth of Happy Meat"

In class: First 30 minutes continues the discussion of philosophical issues raised by factory (industrial) farming of animals. The remaining 45 minutes will be devoted to a discussion of Kaminer and Haynes and the issues raised by them.

Week 9 (March 26, 28)

What is biotechnology? How is plant and animal biotechnology transforming agriculture? Should that transformation continue? What ethical issues are raised?

Tuesday:

Before Class: Read

- Comstock, "Ethics and Genetically Modified Food"
- The Economist Debates Biotechnology. November 2nd -10th 2010. (Focus on pp 5-18, 23-35, 47-59.)
- TBA

In class: Lecture and discussion.

Thursday:

Before Class: Turn in

- a one-paragraph response to a written question you will receive via the message system on RamCT. The details of this short writing assignment will be the same as those for the Week 2 short writing assignment (see above).

The first 30 minutes of class will be an open discussion of biotechnology topics. Last 45 minutes will be set aside for a **graded discussion**.

Week 10 (April 2, 4)

Agriculture and water have a complex relationship. Water is critical to plant and animal production. But agriculture competes for water with many other priorities. Agriculture can degrade water quality and create various human health and environmental impacts. What are the ethical issues we face today and as the demand for water resources continues to grow?

Tuesday:

Before Class: Read

- Reisner, M. 1986, Cadillac Desert. "Introduction."
- Postel, "Troubled Waters"
- Gertner, "The Future is Drying Up"
- TBA

In class: Lecture and discussion.

Thursday:

Before Class: Turn in

- a one-paragraph response to a written question you will receive via the message system on RamCT. The details of this short writing assignment will be the same as those for the Week 2 short writing assignment (see above).

The first 30 minutes of class will be an open discussion of water topics. Last 45 minutes will be set aside for a **graded discussion**.

Week 11 (April 9, 11)

Climate change and agriculture are tightly linked. Agriculture is a major contributor to climate change, but agriculture also offers opportunities to mitigate climate change. Climate change will impact agricultural productivity worldwide. What ethical issues are raised?

Tuesday:

Before Class: Read

- TBA 1
- TBA 2
- TBA 3

In class: Lecture and discussion.

Thursday:

Before Class: Turn in

- a one-paragraph response to a written question you will receive via the message system on RamCT. The details of this short writing assignment will be the same as those for the Week 2 short writing assignment (see above).

The first 30 minutes of class will be an open discussion of climate change topics. Last 45 minutes will be set aside for a **graded discussion**.

Week 12 (April 16, 18)

Agriculture as about Farmers, Agribusiness and Consumers. How should we understand relationships and conflicts? Is farming primarily a business? Are there other important perspectives?

Tuesday:

Before Class: Read or reread

- Hurst, "The Omnivore's Delusion: Against the Agri-intellectuals"
- Media Planet, "Agriculture in America"
- Pollen, "Farmer in Chief"
- Kirschenmann, "Expanding the Vision of Sustainable Agriculture," (especially pages 50-55 and 58-62)

In class: Lecture and discussion.

Thursday:

Before Class: Turn in

- a one-paragraph response to a written question you will receive via the message system on RamCT. The details of this short writing assignment will be the same as those for the Week 2 short writing assignment (see above).

The first 30 minutes of class will be an open discussion of topics related to farmers, agribusiness, and consumers. Last 45 minutes will be set aside for a **graded discussion**.

Week 13 (April 23, 25)

Agriculture as about Government Farm Policy. What is the farm bill? What should it be? How should we address obesity, crop subsidies, environmental degradation, food security, etc.? What is the role of government policy (US and worldwide) in “feeding the planet”?

Tuesday:

Before Class: Read or reread

- Pollen, “Farmer in Chief”
- Editors (Scientific American), “For a Healthier Country, Overhaul Farm Subsidies”
- Gardner, “Introduction”
- Gardner, “Government I: Public Investments and Regulation”
- Foley, “Can We Feed the World?”

In class: Lecture and discussion.

Thursday:

Before Class: Turn in

- a one-paragraph response to a written question you will receive via the message system on RamCT. The details of this short writing assignment will be the same as those for the Week 2 short writing assignment (see above).

The first 30 minutes of class will be an open discussion of topics related to farm policy. Last 45 minutes will be set aside for a **graded discussion**.

Week 14 (April 30, May 2)

Agriculture as about everything – eating. What should we eat? Should agriculture guide what we eat? Should what we eat guide agriculture? How should we make such decisions?

Tuesday:

Before Class: Read

- Kirschenmann, “Can Organic Agriculture Feed the World? And is That the Right Question”
- Ronald and Adamchak, “Deconstructing Dinner: Genetically Engineered, Organically Grown”
- Miller, “Greece’s Diet Crisis: Greeks Abandon Traditional Foods and an Obesity Epidemic is the Result”
- TBA
- Associated Press, “Poll: Fight Obesity Crisis but Keep The Junk Food”

- Agus, “ The 2,000 year-old Wonder Drug”

In class: Lecture and discussion.

Thursday:

Before Class: Turn in

- a one-paragraph response to a written question you will receive via the message system on RamCT. The details of this short writing assignment will be the same as those for the Week 2 short writing assignment (see above).

The first 30 minutes of class will be an open discussion of climate change topics. Last 45 minutes will be set aside for a **graded discussion**.

Week 15 (May 7, 9)

Agriculture as about everything. Should everyone have access to nutritious food and should everyone have enough to eat? Should we help everyone get enough to eat? How?

Tuesday:

Before Class: Read

- Barclay “For Restaurants, Food Waste is Seen as Low Priority”
- Lewis, “Spilled and Spoiled: Exploring Two Worlds of Food Waste”
- Hill, “Spilled and Spoiled: In the U.S. Consumers are the Food Wasters”

In class: Lecture and discussion.

Thursday:

Before Class: Read

- Singer, “The Life You Can Save”

In class: Lecture and discussion.

Final Exam

Monday, May 13, 2013, 9:40-11:40