COURSE OVERVIEW
This honours seminar is devoted to examining the geographies of sustainable food systems - a topic that has exploded in academic and public policy circles over the last five years. The growing interest in sustainable food systems is linked to broader concerns that the conventional agro-industrial food system has not effectively provided a nutritious, ecologically sound and equitable supply of food to the world's population. Technological innovations have provided cheap food to millions, but there are costs of such a system in terms of soil and water depletion, food safety scares, animal welfare, declining rural communities, rising obesity and diet-related health problems, as well as growing food insecurity. These costs were brought into sharp focus in 2007–2008 when a price surge in world food prices led to food-related riots in over 60 countries.

The course begins with the assumption that the conventional agro-industrial food system is malfunctioning. There will be plenty of opportunity, however, for students to debate and question this assumption. The course then moves to examining interpretations of how broken the food system is and what to do about it from a production, distribution and consumption perspective. A variety of theoretical and practical perspectives will be explored, although most of the studies will reflect a spatial and environmental aspect of the food system. Readings will provide evidence from the global north and the global south, as well as urban and rural perspectives. The readings will reveal different conceptual frameworks ranging from political ecology to institutional economics. Issues covered include (i) the history and political economy of the modern food system (ii) definitions of sustainable food systems, including meanings of 'local', 'organic', and 'quality' foods (ii) past and current conceptual perspectives on sustainable food systems, (iii) evidence of new institutional arrangements in particular regions and (iv) directions for future research. A discussion of some of the urban, gender, race, nature-society and social justice issues facing the food system will also be explored.

LEARNING OUTCOMES
• Explain key concepts related to the geography of food systems
• Articulate the history and political economy of the modern food system
• Describe the elements of a sustainable food system from a production, distribution, consumption and waste management perspective
• Reflect on how sustainable food systems enable different theorizations of urban, rural, gender, race, nature-society and justice
• Be aware of policy perspectives on realizing a sustainable food plan
• Demonstrate active listening skills to consider peers’ perspectives and to articulate effective communication
COURSE TOPICS

- Worlds of food: globalizing and re-localizing, historical context of the modern industrial food system, defining sustainable food systems, debating food production, debating food distribution, debating food consumption, sustainable food and rural development, sustainable food and the city, realizing justice in local food systems, policy perspectives

SELECTED COURSE TEXTS & READINGS


