

Food for Thought

Where does our food come from?

Most of us can provide little more of an answer than “from the grocery store.” Yet media headlines and public debates often emphasize pressing issues involving food, from eating disorders and mad cow disease to genetically modified food and threats of ecoterrorism. Increasingly, it has become difficult and even unwise to take for granted the foods that we eat.

Understanding our food sources raises many questions of national and global significance. How will rising petroleum costs affect the availability and cost of food? What is the impact of current farming practices on the environment? How do the cultural meanings we associate with food influence eating habits? Does the loss of small landholding farmers diminish the foundation of a democratic society?

Food-related issues are particularly salient in the local community, a region rich in agriculture as a way of life and a basis of the economy. For example, the shift toward industrial agriculture has made it difficult for family farmers to compete in the global marketplace; a number of Kenyon employees hold jobs at the College in order to provide the income necessary to keep their farms financially viable. As aging farmers sell out to developers, the cornfields and livestock pastures that mark a rural landscape soon give way to residential sprawl and strip malls.

Food for Thought is a special initiative to explore food, farming, and rural life. As the accompanying list of courses suggests, these subjects touch virtually every aspect of the curriculum. For students, taking several of these courses represents an opportunity both to enrich understanding and to forge the cross-disciplinary connections that are central to liberal education. Many of these courses offer the additional opportunity to engage the surrounding community through original scholarly and creative work, broadening students' horizons beyond Gambier Hill and deepening their connection to this place.

Much of the work accomplished in these courses will contribute to an ambitious public project to build a sustainable market for foods produced in and around Knox County. Students and faculty are conducting research on local food supplies and consumer buying habits, developing a local food warehouse and retail outlet in Mount Vernon, and creating exhibits to raise public understanding about the many ways our food choices affect us as individuals and as a society.

For additional information about Food for Thought, visit the Kenyon Rural Life Center Web site at <http://rurallife.kenyon.edu>. To learn more about becoming involved in this initiative, contact Professor Howard Sacks, director of the Rural Life Center.

Certificate in Ecological Agriculture

The Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association (OEFFA)-Kenyon Certificate Program in Ecological Agriculture gives students the opportunity to develop intellectual skills and practical knowledge regarding food and farming systems. Students will (1) develop an understanding of the complex nature of agroecosystems, (2) critically analyze the social, political, and economic institutions in which food and farming systems are embedded, and (3) explore the interplay of social values, personal responsibility, and the achievement of environmental and community goals.

To earn a certificate in ecological agriculture, students must complete three relevant courses and undertake a ten-week summer internship on a farm that uses ecological production methods. These two core elements will be enhanced by additional program components, including participation in workshops and conferences. Each participating student will be eligible to be named an OEFFA Campus Fellow, a position that supports work with the community food system and fosters leadership development.

Participating students earn \$2,500 during their internship and receive a housing allowance, if needed. To apply for the program, contact Professor Sacks or any of the faculty listed below.

Courses

Each of these courses addresses themes relevant to Food for Thought. In some cases, the subject matter is central to the entire course; in others, it represents a distinct unit. Please refer to the brief description accompanying each listing, which notes the particular topics examined in the course. Complete course descriptions may be found in the listings for each department or program. For additional information, please contact the

relevant faculty member. Independent study and summer research offer additional opportunities for academic work; see Professor Sacks for details.

First-Semester Courses

American Culture and the Environment

AMST 310 (.5 unit)
Britz

Among the topics addressed are the ways in which the quest for improvements in food production have played a major role in the transformation of the American landscape.

Anthropology of Food

ANTH 220 (.5 unit)
Hardy

Through cross-cultural comparisons, this course investigates the central role food plays in human biology and culture, including the effects of social, political, and economic issues on human nutrition.

Photography I

ARTS 106 (.5 unit)
Hackbardt

Students will work on food-related issues for a photography project, exhibiting their work in Mt. Vernon's Buckeye Candy building, site of the future local food warehouse.

Sustainable Agriculture

ENVS 494 (.5 unit)
Dean-Otting

Students will work five hours a week on a local farm and meet weekly with the instructor to discuss readings and their farm experience.

Practical Issues in Ethics

PHIL 115 (.5 unit)
Xiao

Factory farming, vegetarianism, and the ecology of rural life are among the key ethical issues discussed in the course.

Second-Semester Courses

Photography I

ARTS 106 (.5 unit)
Hackbardt

See first-semester course description.

Color Photography

ARTS 320 (.5 unit)
Hackbardt

Food and culture, food politics, land use, and environmental issues will comprise a photography project; students may pursue additional projects addressing these themes.

Solar Energy

CHEM 108 (.5 unit)
Cummings

Modern agricultural methods are heavily dependent on petroleum and natural gas; this course explores our global energy challenges from fossil fuels to solar energy alternatives.

Introduction to Environmental Studies

ENVS 112 (.5 unit)
Fennessy, Mauck

This course examines sustainable development, particularly sustainable agriculture, as an important component of our general investigation of the effects of human population size on the environment.