

Alternative Farming Systems and Sustainability ENVI-3500 (3 credits)

Italy: Global Food Security and Sustainability

This syllabus is representative of a typical semester. Because courses develop and change over time to take advantage of unique learning opportunities, actual course content varies from semester to semester.

Course Description

To achieve global resilience and mitigate food insecurity, civil society, NGOs, local and national governments are designing and implementing diverse innovative approaches to food production and distribution. As they do so, they seek to achieve a balance between an increase in food production, the requirements of environmental sustainability, and to ensure equitable access to food supply to disenfranchised communities across the globe. In addition, they support small, resilient, and scalable farming techniques and turn inclusive agricultural development into transformative action to improve the living conditions of the poor and the hungry. What is the potential of these various and diverse initiatives to achieve sustainable food supply and political stability, and what can we learn from them? This course explores these questions through lectures with community, regional, national, and international level advocates of food security at the Castello Sonnino in Montespertoli, Italy, and via carefully designed case studies with Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), World Food Program (WFP), and in Sicily, Turin, and Istria, Croatia.

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of the course, students will be able to:

- Assess the potential of alternative farming systems in achieving food security and environmental sustainability;
- Identify the similarities and differences of the food social movements related to slow food in Montespertoli, Sicily, Turin, and Istria;
- Assess the challenges that food social movements face in promoting their agendas;
- Propose strategies for promoting a food system that promotes social justice, equity and environmental sustainability.

Language of Instruction

This course is taught in English, but students will be exposed to vocabulary related to course content as well as the nuances of alternative farming systems and slow food social movements through in-country expert lectures and field visits in a wide range of venues and regional locales.

Instructional Methods

This course is taught via a close and critical review, of the diverse attempts and initiatives, at community, regional and national levels, to resolve food insecurity. Each student will be expected to criticize one case study and to write a position paper to be presented in class. The course employs case studies, student presentations of projects, videos, diverse voices, and sources of data. In each case study the course examines the structure, actors in the local food system, identify and assess the challenges that they face and identify possible solutions to those problems.

Assignments and Evaluation

Assignment Descriptions and Grading Criteria

1) Case Study Papers and Presentation (30%)

Students should select any one of the case studies listed below with approval from the Academic Director. Each case study should address the following criteria:

- (i) Identify and describe at least three food social movements in that location or region.
- (ii) Assess the challenges that those social movements face as they promote their food justice agendas
- (iii) Propose strategies by which these social movements may overcome these challenges.
- (iv) Develop a 15-minute presentation to be delivered to the group in class.

Students are encouraged to draw on primary data sources and literature reviews.

2) Peer Review of Case Study (20%)

Each student will peer review at least one case study that will be established by the Academic Director. Each peer reviewer presents their feedback immediately following the case study presentation described above.

- (i) Use of data/evidence
- (ii) Validity of the challenges identified and strategies proposed
- (iii) Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the case study paper.

4) Final Essay (40%)

Final essay consists of end of term questions to be assigned by the Academic Director

5) Participation (10%)

This includes active involvement in lectures, readings, discussions and excursions using the following criteria:

- Attendance - promptness to class and positive presence in class.

- Active Listening - paying attention in class and during field excursions, asking appropriate questions, showing interest and enthusiasm (this includes body language), entertaining contradictory perspectives, taking notes.
- Involvement in Class Discussions - either in small or large groups, sharing knowledge. This means challenging yourself to speak up if you usually don't, and also means allowing others to speak if you are a person who tends to dominate class discussions.
- Group Accountability – positive participation in the group during field excursions and classes; not keeping others waiting.
- Displaying Respect – culturally appropriate interaction with hosts, SIT program staff, SIT lecturers and communities.

Assessment

Case Study Papers and Presentation 30%
 Peer Review 20%
 Final Essay 40%
 Participation 10%

Attendance and Participation

Due to the nature of SIT Study Abroad programs, and the importance of student and instructor contributions in each and every class session, attendance at all classes and for all program excursions is required. Criteria for evaluation of student performance include attendance and participation in program activities. Students must fully participate in all program components and courses. Students may not voluntarily opt out of required program activities. Valid reasons for absence – such as illness – must be discussed with the academic director or other designated staff person. Absences impact academic performance, may impact grades, and could result in dismissal from the program.

Late Assignments

SIT Study Abroad programs integrate traditional classroom lectures and discussion with field-based experiences, site visits and debriefs. The curriculum is designed to be cumulative leading up to the completion of the Independent Study Project (ISP). It is critical that students complete assignments in a timely manner to continue to benefit from the sequences in assignments, reflections and experiences throughout the program.

Example: Students may request a justified extension for one paper/assignment during the semester. Requests must be made in writing and at least 12 hours before the posted due date and time. If reason for request is accepted, an extension of up to one week may be granted at that time. Any further requests for extensions will not be granted. Students who fail to submit the assignment within the extension period will receive an 'F' for the assignment.

Grading Scale

94-100%	A
90-93%	A-
87-89%	B+
84-86%	B
80-83%	B-

77-79%	C+
74-76%	C
70-73%	C-
67-69%	D+
64-66%	D
below 64	F

Program Expectations

In this space, Instructors should include course-specific individual and community standards that apply to students and their interactions within the course. Sample examples are provided below as possible policies.

- Show up prepared. Be on time, have your readings completed and points in mind for discussion or clarification. Complying with these elements raises the level of class discussion for everyone.
- Have assignments completed on schedule, printed, and done accordingly to the specified requirements. This will help ensure that your assignments are returned in a timely manner.
- Ask questions in class. Engage the lecturer. These are often very busy professionals who are doing us an honor by coming to speak.
- Comply with academic integrity policies (no plagiarism or cheating, nothing unethical).
- Respect differences of opinion (classmates', lecturers, local constituents engaged with on the visits). You are not expected to agree with everything you hear, but you are expected to listen across difference and consider other perspectives with respect.
- Storing Your Work: Keep several copies of your work as back up and keep one copy accessible to you through an online forum, such as an attachment in your email, the course learning management system, or cloud-based storage. This way your work will always be available to despite technical issues. Lost files, deleted drives, or computer crashes are not excuses for late, missing work.
- Personal Technology Use: Cell phones and other personal electronics can be used for taking notes and other class activities. Off-task usage is not acceptable. You may be marked as absent for habitually using them for something other than classroom activities.
- Course Communication: Course documents and assignments will be posted on the learning management system, Canvas. Although the course calendar provides a broad overview and the general sequence of work and assignments for the course, what we accomplish in class will vary, and revisions to the calendar will be posted at the course site. You will need to check the course site regularly. You are responsible for letting me know about any network-related problems that prevent you from accessing or submitting assignments.
- Content Considerations: Some texts and activities you will encounter in this course delve into sensitive topics that may be emotionally and intellectually challenging. Our classroom is a space where we can engage with challenging ideas, question assumptions, and navigate difficult topics with respect and maturity. As possible, I will flag content and activities that are especially graphic or intense, so we are prepared to address them soberly and sensitively. If you are struggling to keep up with the work or participate in the

course because of the nature of the content and activities, you should speak with me and/or seek help from counseling services.

- Classroom recording policy: To ensure the free and open discussion of ideas, students may not record classroom lectures, discussion and/or activities without the advance written permission of the instructor, and any such recording properly approved in advance can be used solely for the student's own private use.

SIT Policies and Resources

Please refer to the [SIT Study Abroad Handbook](#) and the [Policies](#) section of the SIT website for all academic and student affairs policies. Students are accountable for complying with all published policies. Of particular relevance to this course are the policies regarding: academic integrity, Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), research and ethics in field study and internships, late assignments, academic status, academic appeals, diversity and disability, sexual harassment and misconduct, and the student code of conduct.

Please refer to the SIT Study Abroad Handbook and SIT website for information on important resources and services provided through our central administration in Vermont, such as [Library resources and research support](#), [Disability Services](#), [Counseling Services](#), [Title IX information](#), and [Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion](#) resources.

Course Schedule

**Please be aware that topics and excursions may vary to take advantage of any emerging events, to accommodate changes in our lecturers' availability, and to respect any changes that would affect student safety. Students will be notified if this occurs*

Module One: Introducing the concept of alternative food systems

This module explores the concept of alternative food systems in capitalist cultures. We explore concepts and practices of regenerative agriculture such as agroecology, conservation, agroforestry, sustainable agriculture, biodiversity and restoration ecology. The module critically examines the language, methods, networks and methods of mobilization employed by food movements and other civil society groups in their attempts to promote sustainable farming systems. The module sets the conceptual framing with which students examine the case studies in the rest of the course.

Sessions for this module may include:

- Introduction to alternative farming systems
- Introduction to regenerative agriculture
- Alternative food movements in Italy: epistemologies, methods, networks

Assigned reading:

Pereira, Laura M., Scott Drimie, Kristi Maciejewski, Patrick Bon Tonissen, and ReINETTE Biggs. (2020). "Food System Transformation: Integrating a Political–Economy and Social–Ecological Approach to Regime Shifts" *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 17, no. 4: 1313. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17041313>

Rhodes C. J. (2017). *The imperative of regenerative agriculture*. *Science Progress*. 100 (1) , 80-129.

Holt-Giménez, E. (2019). *Capitalism, Food, and Social Movements: The Political Economy of Food System Transformation*. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*, 9(A), 23–35. <https://doi.org/10.5304/jafscd.2019.091.043>

Nestle, M. (2009). *Reading the Food Social Movement*. *World Literature Today* 83(1), 36-39. doi:10.1353/wlt.2009.0210.

Module Two: Case Study I: Castello Sonnino: Food systems and sustainability.

The following three modules engage issues regarding global security and sustainability in a comparatively. The same issues are addressed in each case study.

Castello Sonnino sits on 150 hectares, in the heart of Montespertoli, just 20 kilometers south of Florence, Italy. Montespertoli is a small village with approximately 14,000 inhabitants, offering a bi-weekly farmers market supermarket, shops and restaurants and surrounded by rich grapevines, olive groves, and forests.

Sessions in this module may include:

- A brief history of Castello Soninno and Montespertoli.
- Farmers movements in Montespertoli.
- Policy frameworks and farmers movements.

Required Reading:

Allen P (2010). *Realizing justice in local food systems*. *Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society* 2010, 3, 295–308 doi:10.1093/cjres/rsq015

Vecchio Y, De Castro P, Masi M, Adinolfi F (2022) *Do Rural Development Policies Really Help Small Farms? A Reflection from Italy*

Salvioni C, Papadopoulou E, Dos Santos M (2014). *Small Farm Survival in Greece, Italy and Portugal*. *EuroChoices Vol 13 No.1 Pages 52-57*

Module Three: Case Study II: Turin Food systems and sustainability.

Turin is a context that blends traditional, progress, modern, and capital-intensive agricultures. Local sensibilities of what farming means vary widely but are also largely progressive and

traditional. Questions of efficiency, ethical food, cultures around culinary preferences, also shape the attitudes and perceptions about the meaning for farming and farms. Students will explore these issues via lectures and in-depth interviews with key personalities in the food industry at various levels, local kitchens, and ordinary persons on the streets.

Sessions in this module will include:

- A brief history of Turin's food systems.
- Dynamics that are shaping Turin's food systems
- Rearticulations of the meanings of food and farming: experiences from below

Assigned reading:

Gullino P, Battisti L, Larcher F. (2018) Linking Multifunctionality and Sustainability for Valuing Peri-Urban Farming: A Case Study in the Turin Metropolitan Area (Italy). Sustainability. 10 (5):1625. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su10051625>

Bottiglieri, M., Toldo, A., & Pettenati, G. (2016). Toward the Turin Food Policy: Good practices and visions. Toward the Turin Food Policy, 1-174.

Toldo, A., Pettenati, G., & Dansero, E. (2015, October). Exploring urban food strategies: four analytical perspectives and a case study (Turin). In Localizing urban food strategies. Farming cities and performing rurality. 7th International Aesop Sustainable Food Planning Conference Proceedings, Torino (pp. 270-282).

Saporito, E. (2017). OrtiAlti as urban regeneration devices: An action-research study on rooftop farming in Turin.

Module Four: Case Study III: Sicily Food systems and sustainability.

Sicily, a region with a great wealth of high-quality agricultural products, including olive oil, wine and ancient grains, urban and rural communities on the margins, provides an excellent context in which students learn about national and local level efforts to combatting global hunger and to contain the greed and unethical approaches of biotechnology and genetically modified foods. In addition students will examine the structure, actors in the local food system, identify and assess the challenges that they face and identify possible solutions to those problems.

Sessions under this module may include:

- A brief history of Sicily's food systems.
- Dynamics that are shaping Sicily's food systems
- Rearticulations of the meanings of food and farming: experiences from below

Colombo, L., Grando, S., & Lepri, G. (2021). *Urban agrarian alliance building in peri-urban Rome: The pivotal role of land access in food system reconfiguration*. In *Resourcing an Agroecological Urbanism* (pp. 85-100). Routledge.

Lucia Palmioli, Stefano Grando, Francesco Di Iacovo, Laura Fastelli, Francesca Galli, Paolo Prospero, Massimo Rovai & Gianluca Brunori (2020) *Small farms' strategies between self-provision and socio-economic integration: effects on food system capacity to provide food and nutrition security*, *Local Environment*, 25:1, 43-56, DOI: 10.1080/13549839.2019.1697869

Module Five: Case Study IV: Istria, Croatia: Food systems and sustainability.

This case study focuses on the role of food processing and export in promoting sustainable food systems.

The sessions in this module may include the following:

- A brief history of Croatia's food systems.
- Dynamics that are shaping Croatia's food systems.
- Rearticulations of the meanings of food and farming: experiences from below

Assigned reading:

Holt-Giménez, E. (2015). Racism and Capitalism: Dual Challenges for the Food Movement. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*, 5(2), 23–25. <https://doi.org/10.5304/jafscd.2015.052.014>

Module Six: Global/International architecture for food security: World Food Programme and the Food and Agriculture Organization

This module assesses the contributions of the global/international architecture of food policy in promoting and achieving a safe, justice and environmentally sustainable food system. The World Food Programme and the Food and Agricultural Organization are the major players within the global architecture of global food policy and will constitute the case studies in this module.

The sessions in the module may include:

- International food policy in practice.
- Potential and limits of the international food policy architecture in promoting food justice.

Assigned reading:

O'Connor, D., Boyle, P., Ilcan, S., & Oliver, M. (2017). Living with insecurity: Food security, resilience, and the World Food Programme (WFP). *Global Social Policy*, 17(1), 3–20. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468018116658776>

Module Seven: Case Study: The European Green Deal and Italy's Slow Food Movements

How has the European Green Deal shaped and articulated within Italy's Slow Food and other alternative Movements? What is its potential to deliver a social justice based and environmentally sound food system?

The sessions in this module may include the following:

- A brief history of the European Green Deal.
- The European Green Deal: Responses from above and from below.
- The potential and limits of the European Green Deal in promoting food justice.

Marco S. (2020) The European Green Deal: Assessing its current state and future implementation. UNICA IRIS Institutional Research Information System.

Haines A, Scheelbeek P (2020). European Green Deal: a major opportunity for health improvement. The Lancet Vol 395. No. 10233, Pp 1327-1329.

[The EU Green Deal-A Roadmap to Sustainable Economies](#)

Jean-Christophe Bureau, Johan Swinnen. (2018) EU policies and global food security, Global Food Security, Volume 16. Pages 106-115,ISSN 2211-9124, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gfs.2017.12.001>