



## FOOD-UE.1116

### Food Politics in the Era of Coronavirus

2 credits, pass/fail

Asynchronous: Lectures, reading, and writing

Synchronous: Discussion and office hours

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Discussion hours: The class will hold open hours for discussion during part of the scheduled time block: Tuesdays 10:00 a.m. - 12:15 p.m. Specific times will be announced each week. Additional times will be scheduled and arranged during the first week of class depending on time-zone constraints. The Tuesday and one other time slot will be reserved for discussion about class content but we will also schedule "anything goes" chat times for talking about whatever you would like to. These are our only chances to get to know you so we hope you will take advantage of them.

#### DESCRIPTION

The global pandemic caused by the viral disease Covid-19 has devastated lives and economies, but also has exposed the contradictions and inequities of food systems that prioritize profits over public health. These were most visible in the culling of food animals and destruction of dairy and vegetable products while the newly unemployed lined up for donations from food banks, as well as in the designation of poorly paid, marginalized farm and slaughterhouse workers as essential to the national defense.

This course explores such matters while investigating the effects of today's global food systems on major food and nutrition problems: undernutrition (hunger, malnutrition, food insecurity), overnutrition (overweight-influenced noncommunicable diseases such as type 2 diabetes and coronary heart disease), and the effects of current food production and consumption practices on the environment and vice versa.

Some stakeholder groups want to maintain current food systems; others want to reform them: hence, politics. This course considers the extent to which food choices should be matters of personal responsibility or government policy, and seeks to define appropriate roles for individuals, government, the food industry, and civil society in determining food system goals and functions. It emphasizes how individuals and groups can advocate for food systems that are healthier, more equitable, and more sustainable—and, therefore, more resilient to viral pandemics.

## OBJECTIVES

- Define what is meant and encompassed by "food system" and "food system policy."
- Describe the three major global problems caused by dysfunctional food systems.
- Identify the principal stakeholders in food system issues and how they use the political system to influence food, nutrition, and public health policies.
- Explain how COVID-19 has revealed weaknesses and contradictions in the U.S. food system.
- Identify appropriate roles for government, the food industry, and civil society in food systems and policies.
- Describe the principal methods used by food, nutrition, and public health advocates to improve food systems.

## CLASS LECTURES

These are posted in five or six video segments per week on NYUClasses under the Resources tab. Except for the first week, they will be posted each Tuesday for the following week's class. You may watch the video segments at any time, but you must finish them no later than the following Monday at 8:00 a.m. in order to get your weekly quiz in on time (more about the first week and how to do this in general in the Schedule and Evaluation sections, below).

## READINGS

Readings should be completed by the class date for which they are listed.

### **Required text:**

Marion Nestle and Kerry Trueman. *Let's Ask Marion: What You Need to Know About the Politics of Food, Nutrition, and Health*. University of California Press, September 1, 2020. Book is available through NYU bookstore and online sellers.

**Required readings:** Available on NYUClasses website under Resources

**Optional Resources:** These are also available in NYUClasses for further reading beyond class requirements

## CLASS SCHEDULE, 2020

### I. SEPTEMBER 8: INTRODUCTION: COVID-19 AND FOOD SYSTEMS

**Watch: video segments on NYU Classes (@Resources):** Do as soon as you can. They will be posted no later than September 2.

**Quiz:** Complete and turn in as soon as you can but no later than Friday, September 11 at 8:00 a.m.)

#### Read

- Let's Ask Marion: Introduction, pages 1-10
- IPES. SPECIAL REPORT | COVID-19 and the Crisis in Food Systems, April 2020.  
<http://www.ipes-food.org/pages/covid19>
- Eric Schlosser. America's Slaughterhouses Aren't Just Killing Animals. The Atlantic, May 12, 2020.  
<https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/05/essentials-meatpacking-coronavirus/611437/>

#### Optional: Watch

Hasan Minhaj on the meat "crisis." Start video at 10 minutes, 15 seconds. YouTube  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nrKxOnNaGHc>

#### Optional: Resources

- Parsons K, Hawkes C, Wells R. Brief 2. What is the food system? A Food policy perspective. In: Rethinking Food Policy: A Fresh Approach to Policy and Practice. London: Centre for Food Policy; 2019 (@NYU Classes—Resources).
- CDC. Update: COVID-19 Among Workers in Meat and Poultry Processing Facilities — United States, April-May 2020. July 10, 2020. MMWR 2020;69(27):887-892.  
<https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6927e2.htm>

## FOOD SYSTEM PROBLEMS

### II. SEPTEMBER 15: UNDERNUTRITION: CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES

**Watch: video segments on NYUClasses (@Resources)**

**Quiz:** Complete and turn in no later than Monday, September 14 at 8:00 a.m.

#### Read

- Let's Ask Marion, chapter 7 pp. 63-70 and chapter 9, pages 79-86.
- Dorothy Rosenbaum. Boost SNAP to Capitalize on Program's Effectiveness and Ability to Respond to Need. Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. July 18, 2020  
<https://www.cbpp.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/7-18-20fa.pdf>

**Optional: Watch**

- CBS documentary, 1968: "Hunger in America"  
<https://www.cbsnews.com/video/hunger-in-america-the-1968-cbs-documentary-that-shocked-america/>

**Optional: Resources**

- Marion Nestle. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP): History, Politics, and Public Health Implications. *American Journal of Public Health*. 1019;109(12):1631-1635.  
<https://ajph.aphapublications.org/doi/10.2105/AJPH.2019.305361>
- Brynne Keith-Jennings, Joseph Llobrera and Stacy Dean. Links of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program With Food Insecurity, Poverty, and Health: Evidence and Potential. *American Journal of Public Health* 2019;109(12):1636-1640.  
<https://ajph.aphapublications.org/doi/10.2105/AJPH.2019.305325> and [Supplemental Material](#)  
<https://ajph.aphapublications.org/doi/suppl/10.2105/AJPH.2019.305325>
- Pollan M. The sickness in our food supply. *New York Review of Books*, June 11, 2020.  
[https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2020/06/11/covid-19-sickness-food-supply/?utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=NYR%20Michael%20Pollan%20on%20our%20food%20system&utm\\_content=NYR%20Michael%20Pollan%20on%20our%20food%20system+CID\\_22ba651e808da23d6723e363914ed74a&utm\\_source=Newsletter&utm\\_term=broken%20of%20system](https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2020/06/11/covid-19-sickness-food-supply/?utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=NYR%20Michael%20Pollan%20on%20our%20food%20system&utm_content=NYR%20Michael%20Pollan%20on%20our%20food%20system+CID_22ba651e808da23d6723e363914ed74a&utm_source=Newsletter&utm_term=broken%20of%20system)

**III. SEPTEMBER 22: OVERNUTRITION: CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES**

**Watch:** video segments on NYUClasses (@Resources)

**Quiz:** Complete and turn in as soon as you can but no later than Monday, September 12 at 8:00 a.m.

**Read**

- Let's Ask Marion, chapter 8: Is obesity really only a matter of personal responsibility? Pp. 71-78.
- Matthew J. Belanger, et al. Covid-19 and Disparities in Nutrition and Obesity. *New England Journal of Medicine*, July 15, 2020.  
<https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMp2021264?query=TOC>
- Monteiro C, et al. Ultra-processed foods: what they are and how to identify them. *Public Health Nutrition* 2019;22(5):936-941 (@NYU Classes—Resources).

**Optional: Resource**

- Hall K, et al. Ultra-processed diets cause excess calorie intake and weight gain: an inpatient randomized controlled trial of ad libitum food intake. *Cell Metabolism* 2019;30:67-77 (@NYUClasses—Resources).

#### IV. SEPTEMBER 29: ENVIRONMENT: CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES

**Watch:** video segments on NYUClasses (@Resources)

**Quiz:** Complete and turn in as soon as you can but no later than Monday, September 28 at 8:00 a.m.

##### Read

- Let's Ask Marion, chapters 10 and 11, pp. 87-102, chapters 13-16, pp. 115-146.
- Nestle M. The farm bill drove me insane. Politico, March 17, 2016. (@NYUClasses—Resources). (<http://www.politico.com/agenda/story/2016/03/farm-bill-congress-usda-food-policy-000070>)

##### Optional: Resources

- Willett W et al. Food in the Anthropocene: the EAT-Lancet Commission on healthy diets from sustainable food systems. The Lancet, January 16, 2019 (@NYU Classes—Resources)
- Swinburn BA, et al. The Global Syndemic of Obesity, Undernutrition, and Climate Change: The Lancet Commission report. The Lancet, January 26, 2019 (@NYU Classes—Resources)

### FRAMEWORKS FOR ACTION

#### V. OCTOBER 6: PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY: DIETARY GUIDELINES

**Watch:** video segments on NYUClasses (@Resources)

**Quiz:** Complete and turn in as soon as you can but no later than Monday, October 5 at 8:00 a.m.

##### Read

- Let's Ask Marion, section I, pp. 13-62

##### Review

- Monteiro C, et al. Ultra-processed foods: what they are and how to identify them. *Public Health Nutrition* 2019;22(5):936-941 (@NYU Classes—Resources).

##### Optional: Resources

- 2015-2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans  
[https://www.dietaryguidelines.gov/sites/default/files/2019-05/2015-2020\\_Dietary\\_Guidelines.pdf](https://www.dietaryguidelines.gov/sites/default/files/2019-05/2015-2020_Dietary_Guidelines.pdf)
- Report of the 2020 Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee  
[https://www.dietaryguidelines.gov/sites/default/files/2020-07/ScientificReport\\_of\\_the\\_2020DietaryGuidelinesAdvisoryCommittee\\_first-print.pdf](https://www.dietaryguidelines.gov/sites/default/files/2020-07/ScientificReport_of_the_2020DietaryGuidelinesAdvisoryCommittee_first-print.pdf)

## VI. OCTOBER 13: SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY: SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Watch: video segments on NYUClasses (@Resources)

Quiz: Complete and turn in as soon as you can but no later than Monday, October 12 at 8:00 a.m.

### Read

- Let's Ask Marion, chapter 12, pp. 103-114, chapter 17, pp. 147-154

### Optional: Resources

- Willett W et al. Food in the Anthropocene: the EAT-Lancet Commission on healthy diets from sustainable food systems. *The Lancet*, January 16, 2019 (@NYU Classes—Resources)
- Swinburn BA, et al. The Global Syndemic of Obesity, Undernutrition, and Climate Change: The Lancet Commission report. *The Lancet*, January 26, 2019 (@NYU Classes—Resource)
- U.N. Sustainable Development Goals (click on the squares; sub-goals are under Targets) <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>  
Progress reports (click on the numbers and Read More): <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/>

## VII. OCTOBER 20: POLITICAL RESPONSIBILITY: FOOD SYSTEM ADVOCACY

Watch: video segments on NYU Classes (@Resources)

Quiz: Complete and turn in as soon as you can but no later than Monday, October 20 at 8:00 a.m.

### Read

- Let's Ask Marion, chapter 18 and conclusion, pp. 155-170
- Hertz J. Afterword: Taking action to create change. In: Jayaraman S, De Master K, eds. *Bite Back: People Taking On Corporate Food and Winning*. Oakland: University of California Press; 2020: 209-221. (@NYU Classes—Resources)

### Optional: Resources

- Swinburn BA, et al. The Global Syndemic of Obesity, Undernutrition, and Climate Change: The Lancet Commission report. *The Lancet*, January 26, 2019 (@NYU Classes—Resources)
- Healthy Food America. Sugar advocacy toolkit. [http://www.healthyfoodamerica.org/sugar\\_advocacy\\_toolkit](http://www.healthyfoodamerica.org/sugar_advocacy_toolkit)
- Philbrick IP, Leonardt D. How to participate in politics. *New York Times*, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/guides/year-of-living-better/how-to-participate-in-government?campaignId=7WWW8&tp=i-H43-A3-BiS-1fsTZd-1y-3NE9Z-1c-1fpxbm-VEri6>
- Union of Concerned Scientists. Healthy food in your community: A toolkit for policy change. October 2014. <https://www.ucsusa.org/sites/default/files/attach/2014/10/ucs-food-policy-toolkit-2014.pdf>

## EVALUATION: GRADING IS PASS/FAIL

For a passing grade, you will watch the videos, do the assigned reading, complete weekly quizzes, and submit three 2-page papers based on what you have watched and read.

### Weekly quizzes

The questions are embedded at the end of the video segments. You will receive a Google form to fill out—and submit--each week. After the first week, these must be submitted no later than the following Monday morning at 8:00 a.m. (New York City time).

Quizzes may be answered in one word or a short phrase. You only need to give one answer, even for questions that have more than one correct answer.

A pass on the quizzes requires:

- Submission of all 7 quizzes by the time they are due.
- Correct answers to at least four of the five-question quizzes (4/5) and to at least the five of the six-question (5/6) quizzes.

### Response papers

At the end of every lecture is a slide with this logo and some questions for your consideration.



You will submit three papers in response to these questions. All must be typed, double-spaced, in a 12-point (or easily readable) font, and cover at least one full page but no more than two pages maximum.

These should express your opinion, thoughts, or reactions to what you have watched or read. Although you may refer to what you have watched or read, **your papers should NOT summarize or repeat that material.** Instead, your paper should discuss what strikes you about what you read or watched relevant to the question, why you agree or disagree with what you read or watched, what you think can or should be done about the issue, or where you see the issue is headed. Say what you think. Don't hold back. Feel free to argue. We want to know how you are processing what you are learning in this class and what you intend to do with what you have learned.

**Paper #1:** Pick one of the questions at the end of lecture #1 or #2 or #3 to respond to. Put your name on the paper and re-state the question you are responding to. Write your response. Do not exceed two pages, double-spaced. DUE: Upload to NYUClasses by Monday, **September 28, 8:00 a.m. EDT.**

**Paper #2:** Pick one of the questions at the end of lecture #4, #5, or #6 to respond to. Put your name on the paper and re-state the question you are responding to. Write your response. Do not exceed two pages, double-spaced. DUE: Upload to MyClasses by **Monday, October 19, 8:00 a.m. EDT.**

**Paper #3:** Pick one of the two questions at the end of lecture #7 to respond to. Put your name on the paper and re-state the question you are responding to. Write your response. Do not exceed two pages, double-spaced. DUE: Upload to MyClasses by **Monday, October 26, 8:00 a.m. EDT.**

A pass on the papers requires the equivalent of at least a B grade on all three papers.

Requirements for a B-grade on the papers

- Complete the paper on time
- Include at least one but no more than two pages (double-spaced, readable font)
- Give thoughts and opinions (with reference to course material but no summaries or repetitions)
- Write in coherent English. **Advice:** use your word processing program's spell and grammar checks.

### **Remediation**

Students who pass all but one of these components will be given the opportunity to complete an extra credit assignment to obtain a passing grade.

### **Resources**

- **Access your course materials :** [NYU Classes](https://nyu.edu/its/classes) (nyu.edu/its/classes)
  - **Databases, journal articles, and more :** [Bobst Library](https://library.nyu.edu) (library.nyu.edu)
- 2
- **Assistance with strengthening your writing :** [NYU Writing Center](https://nyu.mywconline.com) (nyu.mywconline.com)
  - **Obtain 24/7 technology assistance:** [IT Help Desk](https://nyu.edu/it/servicedesk) (nyu.edu/it/servicedesk)