Food and Climate Justice: Resistance and Liberation

Instructors: Brian Tokar and Grace Gershuny

As the world faces intersecting crises of climate, health, and rising social inequities, movements for climate and food justice are advancing a community-centered grassroots response. These movements share common themes, viewing the sources of these crises in institutions of hierarchy and domination, including capitalist structures of racism and colonialism. The extraction of resources and exploitation of marginalized populations for food and energy production, especially in the Global South, are central contributors to worldwide environmental and social degradation. This course will offer a Social Ecology perspective on the background and potential of climate and food justice movements to resist further damage from fossil fuels and agribusiness dominance, while building ecologically harmonious and equitable food and energy systems that can restore soil health, biodiversity, and climate stability.

Each segment will highlight the leadership of historically marginalized communities in shifting the paradigm towards the fundamental principles of non-hierarchy, direct democracy, and unity in diversity. Case studies of specific projects will include video interviews and presentations by frontline advocates as well as recommended readings and other video and audio resources.

Course Goals:

This course aims to use the perspective of Social Ecology to inform participants about the many ways in which the food system crisis and the climate crisis are intimately connected. The social disintegration and ecological destruction that have contributed to the climate, food, and health crises we now face disproportionately affect marginalized communities, whose members are also leaders of multiple movements to address these intersecting crises. We will learn from activists, thinkers, and other leaders in these movements about their efforts to envision and create a more equitable and ecologically harmonious social and political order, as well as how students can

support that work. We will explore the decades-long evolution of social ecology's contributions to social and environmental movements and the central importance of a systemic and transformative outlook for current campaigns around food and climate.

Course Schedule and Readings:

Week 1: Social ecology in environmental, social and agricultural movements

Social ecology has played an influential role in social and environmental movements since the late 1960s. We will discuss the involvement of social ecologists in 1970s-era antinuclear activism, the evolution of organic agriculture and agroecology, relocalization, Green politics, the global justice/alterglobalization movement, Occupy Wall Street, and others. We will also begin to address the fundamental links between food and climate issues and the interrelated roots of the climate crisis in colonialism, racism, capitalism and historical patterns of land degradation.

Core readings:

Brian Tokar, "Social Ecology and the Future of Ecological Movements," from *Toward Climate Justice: Perspectives on the Climate Crisis & Social Change*

Grace Gershuny, "*The Roots of the True Organic Vision" pp 12-24 in* Organic Revolutionary: *A Memoir of the Movement for Real Food, Planetary Healing, and Human Liberation (3rd ed),*

Eric Holt-Gimenez, "How Our Capitalist Food System Came to Be," (Chapter 1) in *A Foodie's Guide to Capitalism*

Other resources:

Dan Chodorkoff, "Social Ecology: An Ecological Humanism," from *The Anthropology of Utopia*

Brian Tokar, "Farms, Food Sovereignty, and the Emerging Climate Justice Movement," from Eric Holt-Giménez, ed., *Food Movements Unite*

GRAIN. "An Agribusiness Greenwashing Glossary," September 2022.

Week 2: Ecosystem health and the politics of biodiversity

We will examine the importance of biodiversity to ecosystem stability, agroecosystem health and the preservation of planetary boundaries, including the ways that the health of interdependent plants, animals, fungi and humans requires diversity of life forms and connections. How do organic, regenerative and agroecological practices aim to restore lost biodiversity and support a holistic outlook on health? How do we foreground Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Indigenous communities as essential protectors of biodiversity? We will also discuss recent international debates over how to best protect biodiversity, including the outcomes of the 2022 Conference of Parties to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity and debates surrounding biodiversity targets such as '30 X 30' – the proposal to protect 30% of biodiversity by 2030.

Core readings:

Miguel Altieri, "Scaling Up Agroecological Approaches for Food Sovereignty in Latin America," from *Food Sovereignty*

Helena Paul, Marketing the Planet: The financialization of nature, from *Radical Ecological Democracy* (2022)

Liz Carlisle. *Healing Grounds: Climate, Justice, and the Deep Roots of Regenerative Farming*. Island Press, 2022. Chapter 3, "Hidden Hotspots of Biodiversity"

Salvatore Ceccarelli, "Nurturing Diversity in our Guts and on our Farms to Reduce Health Risks and Increase Food System Resilience," in Navdanya International, *The Future of Food: Farming with Nature, Cultivating the Future* (2020)

Other resources:

Navdanya International. *Biodiversity is Life* (2022)

Christopher Cook, Kari Hammerschlag, & Kendra Klein. *Farming for the Future.* Friends of the Earth (2016)

Heribert Hirt. Healthy soils for healthy plants for healthy humans. *EMBO Reports* (2020) 21:e51069

T. Caro, et al., "An inconvenient misconception: Climate change is not the principal driver of biodiversity loss," *Conservation Letters* Vol. 15 (2022)

Omar Felipe Giraldo & Peter Michael Rosset "Emancipatory agroecologies: social and political principles," *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 50:3 (2023)

Mindy J. Price, et al. "Agroecology in the North: Centering Indigenous food sovereignty and land stewardship in agriculture 'frontiers'," *Agriculture and Human Values* Vol. 39 (2022).

CADTM International, "Financing the 30×30 Agenda for the Oceans: Debt for Nature Swaps Should be Rejected," 12/22 from the Committee for the Cancellation of the Third World Debt (CADTM - Comité pour l'annulation de la dette du Tiers Monde)

Week 3: Food justice issues and resistance movements

We will discuss the distinctions between terms such as "food security," "food sovereignty," and "food justice," and examine historical and current movements to resist various forms of oppression through demands and actions that enhance access to food and land. We will use examples from civil rights campaigns, international peasant movements and others to illustrate the importance of food as a unifying factor in social change movements.

Core readings:

Eric Holt-Giménez, "Food Security, Food Justice, or Food Sovereignty," from A. Alkon and J. Agyeman, eds., *Cultivating Food Justice*

Monica M. White, "Black Farmers, Agriculture and Resistance," from *Freedom Farmers: Agricultural Resistance and the Black Freedom Movement*

Nyeleni Declaration on Food Sovereignty (2007)

Other resources:

Sam Grey & Raj Patel, "What Does Food Sovereignty Look Like?" *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 36:3 (2009)

Eric Holt-Gimenez, Chapter 5: “Power and Privilege in the Food System: Gender, Race, and Class” in *A Foodie’s Guide to Capitalism*

Nyeleni Forum for Food Sovereignty Synthesis Report, from https://nyeleni.org/IMG/pdf/31Mar2007NyeleniSynthesisReport-en.pdf

Fred Magdoff, “Twenty-First-Century Land Grabs: Accumulation by Agricultural Dispossession,” *Monthly Review* 65:6 (Nov. 2013)

Brant, S., Williams, K., Andrews, J., Hammelman, C., & Levkoe, C. Z. Indigenous food systems and food sovereignty: A collaborative conversation from the American Association of Geographers 2022 Annual Meeting. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*, *12*(3) (2023).

GRAIN. UPOV: The Great Seeds Robbery – Which is Why We Must Defend Them.

Week 4: Land justice is food justice

We will focus on contemporary activists and movements that aim to address the climate crisis and related forms of oppression by reclaiming access to land and food producing resources for marginalized communities of color, queer, Indigenous peoples and refugees. Innovative approaches to restoring the commons and circumventing the failures of the market economy, such as voluntary reparations, rematriation of native lands, community land trusts, land sharing and other local food/land sovereignty projects will be explored.

Core readings:

Leah Penniman. *Farming While Black* - Chapter 1, Finding Land & Resources

Monica White. “Drawing on the Past toward a Food Sovereign Future: The Detroit Black Community Food Security Network,” Chapter 5 from *Freedom Farmers: Agricultural Resistance and the Black Freedom Movement*

Liz Carlisle. *Healing Grounds: Climate, Justice, and the Deep Roots of Regenerative Farming*: Conclusion

Other resources:

The Ecologist, “The Commons: Where the Community Has Authority,” *from Whose Common Future?*

Winona LaDuke. *Recovering the Sacred: The Power of Naming and Claiming* - Part 3: Seeds and Medicine: “Three Sisters” and “Wild Rice”

J. Willoughby and D. DeCandia, “How Making Reparations Can Remake This Land,” from *The New Farmer’s Almanac*, via agrariantrust.org (2019)

Isaac Sohn Leslie, *Queer Farmland: Land Access Strategies for Small Scale Agriculture, Society & Natural Resources* (2019*)*

Week 5: International movements for food justice and food sovereignty

International movements such as the Landless Workers’ Movement (MST) in Brazil and the worldwide network of land-based people’s movements known as La Vía Campesina have played a unique role in raising awareness and

asserting the rights and sovereignty of people seeking to sustain their connections to the lands where they live and work. They have advanced a worldwide reassertion of "peasant" identities and an increasingly assertive understanding of food sovereignty, centering respect for the traditional foodways of Indigenous peoples. We will discuss the history and current significance of several of these movements, including the international dimensions of the organic agriculture movement.

Core readings:

María Elena Martínez-Torres and Peter Rosset, "La Via Campesina: Transnationalizing Peasant Struggle and Hope," from Richard Stahler-Sholk, *et al.*, eds., *Latin American Social Movements in the Twenty-First Century: Resistance, Power and Democracy*

Benjamin Dangl, "Occupy, Resist, Produce: The Strategy and Political Vision of Brazil's Landless Workers' Movement," *Toward Freedom* (May 2018)

Gunnar Rundgren. *Global Eating Disorder,* Chapters 25, "Looking Ahead," & 26, "Farming for the Future." (2014)

Other resources:

Chaia Heller, "Creating a New Rationality of Agriculture in the Age of GMOs, McDo and the WTO," from *Food, Farms and Solidarity: French Farmers Challenge Industrial Agriculture and Genetically Modified Crops* (excerpt)

Rachel Soper, "From protecting peasant livelihoods to essentializing peasant agriculture: problematic trends in food sovereignty discourse," *Journal of Peasant Studies* 47:2 (2020)

P.M. Rosset and L. Pinheiro Barbosa, "Peasant autonomy:the necessary debate in Latin America," *Interface Journal* 13:1 (2021)

Nelson Álvarez Febles and Georges F. Félix, "Hurricane María, Agroecology, and Climate Change Resiliency," from B. Tokar and T. Gilbertson, eds., *Climate Justice and Community Renewal*

P. Nicholson & S. M. Borras Jr., "It wasn't an intellectual construction: the founding of La Via Campesina, achievements and challenges – a conversation," *Journal of Peasant Studies* 50:2 (2023)

Angus Wright and Wendy Wofford, Introduction from *To Inherit the Earth: The Landless Movement and the Struggle for a New Brazil*

F. Rodríguez & A. P. Sosa Varrotti, " Thirty years of sowing hope to globalise the struggle: women and youth of La Via Campesina in the constructionof food sovereignty – a conversation," *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 50:2 (2023)

Week 6: The case for climate justice

Climate activists around the world have come to appreciate the need for a justice-centered approach to the global climate crisis. This is strengthened by the limitations of conventional climate diplomacy and policies, the critique of capitalist false solutions to climate problems, and the compelling reassessment of climate politics-as-usual that has emerged from environmental justice communities, Indigenous people's organizations and other counter-systemic movements. We will consider the disproportionate impacts of climate disruptions on historically marginalized peoples, recent research clarifying the sectors most responsible for climate-altering emissions, and insights from social ecology exploring why justice may not be enough.

Core readings:

Ian Angus, “A New (and Deadly) Climate Regime,” from *Facing the Anthropocene*

Brian Tokar, “Climate Justice and Community Renewal: An Introduction,” from B. Tokar and T. Gilbertson, eds., *Climate Justice and Community Renewal: Resistance and Grassroots Solutions*

Aviva Chomsky, “The United States *Is* Exceptional, Just Not in the Ways Any of Us Should Want,” From *TomDispatch* (3/22)

Other resources:

Charlie Wood, “As We Confront The Climate Crisis, Is Bigger And Faster Always Better?” from *Waging Nonviolence* (2023)

Nina Lakhani, “The food emissions ‘solutions’ alarming experts after Cop27,” *The Guardian* 12/7/22

Lisa Song, “An (Even More) Inconvenient Truth: Why Carbon Credits For Forest Preservation May Be Worse Than Nothing,” from *ProPublica* (2019)

Steffen Böhm, “Why are carbon markets failing?” from *The Guardian* (4/12/13)

Brian Tokar, “Is the Paris climate conference designed to fail?”, “The Paris Climate Agreement: Hope or Hype?” (both 2015), and “On the IPCC’s latest climate report: What does it tell us?” (2021) from *Counterpunch*, *PopularResistance* and other online sources.

Larry Lohmann, “White climate, white energy: a time for movement reflection?” The Corner House (U.K., 2020)

Week 7: Climate justice movements

A closer look at the emergence and contributions of various campaigns for climate justice around the world. We will examine the various influences that shape climate justice perspectives, the evolution and development of the movement, and the potential contributions of a social ecology outlook to the continuing evolution of climate justice.

Core readings:

Brian Tokar, “On the evolution and continuing development of the climate justice movement,” from the *Routledge Handbook of Climate Justice*

Brian Tokar, “On social ecology and the movement for climate justice,” from S. G. Jacobsen, ed., *Climate Justice and the Economy: Social mobilization, knowledge and the political*

Jacqui Patterson, “And The People Shall Lead: Centralizing Frontline Community Leadership in the Movement Towards a Sustainable Planet,” NAACP Environmental and Climate Justice Program

Other resources:

Winona LaDuke, “Ending the Age of Fossil Fuels and Building an Economics for the Seventh Generation,” from *A Line in the Tar Sands*

Andreas Malm, “A Return to the Flow? Obstacles to the Transition,” from *Fossil Capital*

Sean Sweeney, “Working Toward Energy Democracy,” from *State of the World 2014*

Aaron Vansintjan, “Accelerationism… and Degrowth? The Left’s Strange Bedfellows,” from the ISE blog, social-ecology.org

"Hoodwinked in the Hothouse: False Solutions to Climate Change," from climatefalsesolutions.org, supported by the Indigenous Environmental Network and others

Week 8: Looking forward

An exploration of the long-range and potentially utopian dimensions of community-centered food and climate justice movements. Movements for agroecology, community resilience, and regeneration at all levels of society are integral to addressing the climate crisis. We will critically examine calls for a “just transition” to new economic models needed to stabilize the climate and ensure basic human needs for all. How can these movements evolve beyond their local manifestations and actualize a fully transformative future vision?

Core readings:

Ole Martin Sandberg, “Climate Disruption, Political Stability, and Collective Imagination,” *Radical Philosophy Review* (2020)

Brian Tokar, “On Utopian Aspirations in the Climate Movement,” from *Toward Climate Justice: Perspectives on the Climate Crisis & Social Change*

IPES Food & ETC Group. *A Long Food Movement: Transforming Food Systems by 2045*, Executive Summary (2021)

Other resources:

Ronnie Cummins. *Grassroots Rising.* Chapter 7, “The Global Road to Regeneration.”

Eric Holt-Gimenez. “Conclusion: Changing Everything: Food, Capitalism, and the Challenges of Our Time” in *A Foodie’s Guide to Capitalism* .

Leah Penniman. Farming While Black. Ch. 15, "Movement Building," pp. 281-298

Information for students seeing graduate or undergraduate credit through the Vermont State University’s Center for Schools

Students enrolled in this course will complete a series of activities, readings, and reflections before, during and/or after any scheduled face-to-face or synchronous sessions. This will assure that the standard expectations for a credited course, both new learning and hours of outside preparation, are sufficiently met.

Course Objectives:

Students will be able to:

- Understand the history and evolution of movements for climate and food justice, including the emergence of key concepts such as food sovereignty and climate inequality.
- Think critically about the intersection of food system dysfunction, climate instability, and social and racial injustices.
- Critically analyze false solutions to food and climate crises that are grounded in neoliberal political practices.

Course Assignments:

The course entails an average of 12 hours (to be confirmed by VSU staff) of weekly engagement, consisting of the following elements: (1) attending a weekly 2-hour online lecture/webinar over the course of eight weeks, (2) participating actively in weekly online discussion forums or submitting weekly commentaries on the course material, and (3) submitting a final paper/project. Students are expected to keep up with assigned readings and view related multimedia content. Engagement with course content will be demonstrated through weekly participation in class discussions and online forums and commentaries.

Projects:

In consultation with the instructor, students will design their own final project that integrates theory and knowledge from the course with real-world engagement and action. This will culminate in both a student-designed activity or project and 10-12-page research and reflection paper. Examples of projects include participating in and critically reflecting upon ongoing local activism or advocacy work; applying social-ecological principles to a relevant community project; creating and offering a multimedia presentation that elaborates themes from the class; or developing a wholly unique project that reflects your own inspirations and creativity. This assignment aims to foster your ability to use theory as a lens to ground personal action and transformation, reflecting upon how your own personal history and experience resonate within larger social, economic, political and ecological contexts.

Completion of this project includes a critical reflection and research paper that is due 2 weeks following the end of the VSU semester. The paper will summarize what you have accomplished and learned through the project, and draw upon insights and analysis from the course readings. It should be accurately referenced (using any accepted and consistent format), using a mix of materials from our class readings and your own research materials. This paper will be evaluated by ISE faculty and given careful feedback from the instructor.

Course Evaluation & Grading:

Students will be assessed according to their participation, papers, and work projects, based on the following evaluation guidelines: the ability to think analytically, express ideas effectively through written and communication, exchange ideas effectively through oral communication, bring innovation to their work, envisage and work independently on a project, and to accept and act on criticism. Good papers take time and come in drafts, so start early and ask a friend or colleague to read it – your final project in particular. Research librarians are an excellent resource to help get you started, as is the VSU writing center. Plagiarism is counterproductive and you'll get caught. Here are some tips on how to avoid it: https://www1.chapman.edu/~babbie/plag00.html.

If you're stuck or pressed for time ask for help or an extension. Lastly, we recommend checking out this useful short article on active reading strategies that can help you more efficiently identify the main arguments and key evidence in sometimes dense academic texts: http://blogs.swarthmore.edu/burke/permanent-features-advice-on-academia/how-to-read- in-college/.

Vermont State University Academic Policies

Grading Policy:

Grades are indicated by letters with a designated "quality point" value assigned to each as follows:

A	4.0	B+	3.3	B-	2.7
A-	3.7	B	3.0	C+	2.3

A grade of **B- or better** must be achieved to count this course toward a graduate degree at VTSU. For questions on transfer pathways, please contact your contact within VTSU's Department of Education. Additional grading information can be found in the VTSU Graduate Catalog under Academic Policies, Credits & Grading: https://catalog.vermontstate.edu/content.php?catoid=8&navoid=119

Academic Honesty Policy

Vermont State University upholds high standards of academic integrity from all community members. Academic integrity encompasses honesty, trust, fairness, respect, responsibility, and the courage to act on these fundamental values (International Center for Academic Integrity [ICAI], 2021; The Fundamental Values of Academic Integrity, 3rd ed.). A student who fails to uphold these values may experience academic consequences including a grade of F, indicating no credit, for assignments or courses, or dismissal from the University. Examples of failure to uphold academic integrity may include using unauthorized aids to complete or enhance academic work, copying another person's work on exams, quizzes, or assignments, or engaging in other forms of plagiarism. To plagiarize is to use someone else's words or ideas without full and proper citation and to present them as one's own. The sharing of VTSU password and login credentials to misrepresent oneself in online learning is a violation of academic integrity. Violations need not be intentional in nature. All members of the VTSU community are expected to investigate and understand their responsibility to act with integrity, and to seek assistance when uncertain. For more information, please see the VTSU Graduate Catalog Academic Integrity Policy: https://catalog.vermontstate.edu/content.php?catoid=8&navoid=119#academic-integrity

Use and Ownership of Copyrighted Materials

For information and guidance, faculty and students are referred to the Vermont State Colleges Manual of Policy and Procedures annual disclosure regarding illegal file sharing and the Higher Education Opportunity Act, accessible online at the following address: https://www.vsc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/VSC-Annual-Notice.pdf

Accommodations

It is the policy of Vermont State University to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, and any other applicable federal and state laws that prohibit discrimination on the basis of disability. The university is committed to providing reasonable accommodations to qualified students with disabilities so that no such student shall, by reason of disability, be excluded from participating in or be denied the benefits of services programs or activities at the university. More information is available at https://vermontstate.edu/academics/student-success/disability-services/.

Course Drop Policy:

Vermont State University offers courses to educators with the expectation that participants will complete the course. However, the University realizes circumstances arise in one's personal life that may cause disruptions. **The policy for dropping a course is that a participant will notify the instructor in writing of the intent to withdraw from the course. The withdrawal notice should be made within the first week of the course and should include the reason for withdrawing.** After week one, changes in class status will be considered for health, bereavement, and personal or emergency situations only. Those who withdraw without adhering to this policy may receive a failing grade on their transcript and/or be liable for associated course costs.

Please direct any drop requests and questions for this course to the VtSU Center for Schools, cfs@castleton.edu

Transcript Request:

www.castleton.edu/transcripts. Please direct transcript request questions to registrar@vermontstate.edu.