

NUT215: Fundamentals of U.S. Agriculture

Fall 2011

General Outline

Instructor: Tim Griffin
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Class Time: 9:00am – 12: noon Tuesday
Location: Room 118 Jaharis
Office Hours: Tuesday 1:30-3:00 or arranged

The principle objective of NUT215 is to **establish a common knowledge base and understanding of U.S. Agriculture**. To do so, we will discuss historical and contemporary science, policy and culture. We will focus on:

- *Facts* - for example, what do current farms actually look like,
- *Context* - past policy decisions provide the foundation for current issues,
- *20th-21st Centuries* – not exclusively but mostly, and
- *U.S Systems* – also not exclusively.

There are a number of readings for the class: these readings are intended to compliment, not duplicate, what we discuss in class. All readings will be posted as PDF files on Angel (<http://friedmanlearning.tufts.edu/default.asp>). There are no required books to purchase for the class¹. If there are topics for which you need (or want) additional information, there is also a Repository of AFE literature on Angel (look at lower left corner when you log on), that contains about 1000 articles/publications, categorized by topic.

The lecture periods serve three primary purposes:

- *Content* – I will provide specific information on the topics, and also the broader context
- *Information Gathering* – this part is new this year. In about one-half of the class periods, we will use the last hour or so to explore specific data sources or information portals (see also the assignments on “Characterizing Agriculture and Food Issues”). For example, very early in semester, we will look at the Census of Agriculture, a rich source of data on the current structure of agriculture at the farm level.
- *Discussion* – it is perfectly acceptable to challenge me in class (I will not be shy about doing the same thing!). If something is not clear – ask. If you want more information, or practical examples – ask. As the saying goes “There are no dumb questions, only dumb answers.”

¹ We will discuss some of the literature that is connected to agriculture. If you want my opinion, here are three good books: *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (Agee & Evans), *The Grapes of Wrath* (Steinbeck), and *The Unsettling of America* (Berry).

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The semester is divided into four topical sections (although the lines are blurry). There are shown below, along with an approximate schedule.

U.S. Agriculture Past and Present

Date	Content	Data/Information
Sept. 6	Introductions; Defining Agriculture in the U.S.; Development and Change in U.S. Agriculture	
Sept. 13	The Industrialization of U.S. Agriculture; Agrarian Values and Agriculture in Literature	Introduction to the Census of Agriculture
Sept. 20	The Consequences of Industrialization	Environmental impacts from agriculture
Sept. 27	Travelogue of U.S. Agriculture	QUIZ #1

Agricultural Policy Past and Present

Oct. 4	U.S. Agricultural and Land Policy before 1930	Thomas (legislation database)
Oct. 11	The Dust Bowl, the Depression, and the Coming of the New Deal	
Oct. 18	Agricultural Payments in the U.S.: Subsidies, Conservation, and All the Rest	USDA Leadership at the state level
Oct. 25	Agriculture and State Governments	Federal-state partnerships

Food System Beyond the Farm Gate

Nov. 1	People in the Food System	QUIZ #2
Nov. 15	Social Justice and the Food System; Food System Components beyond the Farm	NAICS data in the economic census
Nov. 22	The Role of Local in the Food System Investments in Research and Outreach	

The Future for the Food System

Nov. 29	The Challenges of Global Food Security	
Dec. 6	To Be Determined!	

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Assignments

Your grade in NUT215 will be determined by *two quizzes* intervals (targeted to be about 30-45 minutes each), seven topical assignments, and term paper.

Quizzes (2)	=	15% each
Topical Assignments:	=	35% (5% for each)
Term Paper	=	35%
Total	=	100%

Topical Assignments: Due throughout the semester.

New to NUT215 this year is a series of what I am calling Topical Assignments. The primary purpose of these assignments (there are seven of them, due about every two weeks) is to familiarize you with the wide range of sources of information on farms, agricultural impacts on the environment, the interactions of agriculture with government at different levels, and other topics.

Step 1 in this process is to select a U.S. state. Here are two suggestions for you: 1) I encourage you to select a state other than your home state (which, presumably, you are already familiar with), and 2) consider a state that has significant and/or diverse agriculture. **I will ask you to identify your state in class on September 13, 2011.**

Below are the first two topical assignments. Additional assignments will be provided as the semester proceeds.

Assignment 1: General information about agriculture

Data Source: **U.S. Census of Agriculture (2008)**

- a. Quantify the agricultural land base (be specific, and indicate which data table you used as a source)
- b. Quantify the economic contribution of agriculture (farm-gate)
- c. Identify the top five (5) agricultural products in your state, and provide the number of farms producing this product (it might be a category of products, like "Vegetables"). For crops, indicate the acreage associated with this product

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Assignment 2: Changes in farm structure over time

Data Sources: **U.S. Census of Agriculture**, at 7-15 year intervals (at least 3 Census)

- a. Select one crop (or crop category) and using data from the Census over time, document how the farm structure has changed. Specifically, demonstrate how the number and size of farms has changed over the given time period. Consider producing a simple graphic to illustrate the change.
- b. Do the same for one livestock category or farm type.
- c. For both a) and b), make sure you document precisely where the data came from in the Census documents.

Term Paper Assignment 2: Due Monday, December 12, 2011

Structural changes within the agricultural and food system are clearly identifiable over the last 100 or so years. Choose an aspect related to **the structure of U.S agriculture** that you consider to be a problem. The possibilities are pretty broad. At the farm level, they include the distribution of farm size, extreme specialization, indebtedness, the role of hired labor, the aging of the farmer population, corporate ownership of farms, or tenancy. For agriculture in the wider sense, it could also include consolidation of manufacturing, distribution or processing. The U.S. Census of Agriculture is a primary data source on structural changes at the farm level, and you should use information from this source to document structural change. For other food system components you will need other data sources.

Cover the following in a paper of 10 pages (double spaced please):

- The current situation;
- Why you consider it a problem;
- How the situation has developed over time;
- What, if anything, the government or private organizations have done or are doing about it (this could include actions that directly or indirectly either aggravate the problem or ameliorate it); and
- What you think should be done about it, either by the government or someone else.

In arguing that something is a problem, support this view with objective arguments to the extent possible; don't just go with a gut feeling that something is "bad." Also, acknowledge the possible benefits of our having gone the way we did, even if in balance you think these do not outweigh the disadvantages of having done so.

This paper should also be submitted electronically as an MS Word document, via email to Timothy.Griffin@Tufts.edu by 5:00 pm on Friday December 11, 2010. Because this is a longer paper, think also about using heading, subheadings, etc. to add some structure to the paper.