FOOD SYSTEMS POLICIES AND POLITICS: AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION, PUBLIC HEALTH
Spring 2020

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Course number: NUTR-GE 2280.001 (1 credit, graded pass/fail)
Time: Wednesdays 4:55-6:35
Place: 208 Silver
Dates: February 12, 19, 26, March 4
Office hours: 3:00 p.m. on class days or by appointment at 411 Lafayette, 5th Floor

> "We should recognize that food systems are driven by economic factors and self-interests. Whether we like it or not, the "value" in food value chains is economic value, not nutritional value. Converting nutritious agricultural commodities into processed foods high in sugar, sweeteners and fat while low in micronutrients and fiber adds economic value in the supply chain but causes increased micronutrient deficiencies, obesity, diabetes and other chronic diseases. We need to look for win-wins in which economic and nutrition goals can be pursued simultaneously."   –Per Pinstrup-Anderson, The Borlaug Blog, 11-13-17

Description
This brief survey course deals with the big-picture context of today's most important global problems in public health nutrition: hunger and malnutrition (food insecurity), food overconsumption and its health consequences (obesity and noncommunicable diseases), and the effects of food production and consumption systems on the environment and climate. It emphasizes systems approaches to addressing these problems. The course is based on the premise that a rational goal for any national food policy is to create food systems that reduce malnutrition and obesity, promote health, protect the environment, are sustainable, and support the livelihoods of participants. Some stakeholder groups do not agree with this premise. Hence: politics. In addition to dealing with food system questions, this course also addresses fundamental questions in public health nutrition: What are appropriate roles for individuals, government, the food industry, and civil society? Should food choices be matters of individual responsibility or government policy? In an ideal world, what should be the roles of stakeholder groups? What are the best ways to advocate for healthier and more sustainable food systems and stakeholder accountability?

Objectives
- Define what is meant by a food system and by food system policy.
- Explain why food systems matter to nutrition and public health.
- Identify the principal stakeholders in food system issues, domestically and internationally.
- Describe how stakeholders use the political system to influence food and nutrition policies.
- Describe the principal elements of food system policies: rationale, goal, implementation strategy, stakeholder positions, and politics.
- Identify appropriate food system roles for government, the food industry, and civil society.
- Describe the principal methods used by food, nutrition, and public health advocates to improve food systems.

CLASS SCHEDULE AND READINGS
Articles and slides shown in class will be posted on the NYU Classes website under Resources.

I.   **February 12: Introduction: Food system policy and politics**
   Topics
   - Definitions: food system, food politics, food policy
   - Food system problems: undernutrition, overnutrition, environmental effects
   - Diet for planetary health
   - US Dietary guidelines
   Read (see Reading Guidelines following this outline)
   - 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)
   Browse
   - 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).
     Consider: Food systems approaches: Strengths? Limitations?
   - Dietary Guidelines for Americans. https://www.dietaryguidelines.gov
     Questions and Topics Under Review. https://www.dietaryguidelines.gov/work-under-way/review-science/topics-and-questions-under-review
     Consider: What's missing?

II. **February 19: Triple-duty actions: hunger, obesity, climate change**
   Topics
   - The concept of ultraprocessed
   - Double or triple-duty approaches to policy development
   - Role of food industry
   Read (see Reading Guidelines)
   - 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)
   - 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).
   Read: graph on first page, introduction,Table 1(browse the rest)
   - 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 (@NYU Classes—Resources)..
     Consider*: implications for dietary advice

III. February 26: Frameworks for action

Topics

- The disconnect in current US food policies
- Sustainable development goals
- Food systems approaches to policy development

Read

- Nestle M. The farm bill drove me insane. Politico, March 17,. 2016. http://www.politico.com/agenda/story/2016/03/farm-bill-congress-usda-food-policy-000070

Read (see Reading Guidelines)

- 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).

Browse

- 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/

Consider: Which goals address food and nutrition issues? What's missing?

IV. March 4: Food systems advocacy

Topics

- Advocacy: goals, methods, rationale
- Case studies: soda taxes, front-of-package warning labels

Read

- Healthy Food America. 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

Browse

- 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
- World Cancer Research Fund. NOURISHING database. https://www.wcrf.org/int/policy/nourishing-database

Consider: What factors are most critical for identifying and achieving advocacy goals?

EVALUATION: GRADING IS PASS/FAIL

For a passing grade, you will attend class, do the assigned reading, and post on the NYU Classes website your questions and thoughts about the material. What strikes you about the course material and information? What do you agree or disagree with? Why? What would you like to hear more about?

DUE: each week by 11:00 p.m. on the Monday prior to the next class. Start with questions, then comment. Use no more than two pages, double-spaced (be sure to put your name on it). Submit papers to NYU Classes under Assignments. Submissions will not be graded, but Prof. Nestle will read and comment on them (briefly).

A Pass requires attendance and <u>three</u> submssions of written questions and comments.

READING GUIDELINES

Operational definitions

- *Read:* Do the best you can to understand what is being said and the main points of the material. Note what you do and do not understand. Are you convinced by the arguments? So you agree with them? If not, why not.
- *Browse:* Get an idea of what is covered in the material and read what interests you.

EAT-LANCET REPORT

For class on February 12

Section 1: **Read** pages 1-15. As a guide to the reading, see if you can:

- Define the principal terms used in this report.
- List the report's principal recommendations. Explain their justifications.
- Define the Planetary Health Diet. Is it reasonable? Feasible? Sustainable?
- Describe how these recommendations do or do not apply to low- and middle-income populations.

Sections 2 and 3:

Read pages 15-16

- Explain why the current agricultural system is not sustainable.

Browse from page 16 (global carbon budget) to 31

- Note Table 4, p 24, Do these measures for reducing the environmental effects of food production make sense? Are they feasible?
- Look at Figure 4, p 25. Which foods have the greatest environmental impact. Why?
- Read Table 5, p 31. Are you cheered by the "reasons to be cheerful?"

Section 4

Browse pages 31-39

- Define what is meant by the Great Food Transformation.
- Note the 5 strategies: Are they likely to be effective?

Read the Conclusion, page 39

- Why do you think this report elicited so much press attention?
- What contribution does it make to food systems thinking? Public health nutrition?

GLOBAL SYNDEMIC REPORT

For class on February 19

Read pages 1-5
- Know the meanings of the principal terms used in this report (Panel 2).
- Describe how policies, economic incentives or disincentives, and social norms act as deep drivers of the Global Syndemic.

Browse p 6-10: Why is this information in the report?

Read: Re-thinking obesity p. 10-12

Browse: complex adaptive systems p. 12-13: Explain why this information is included.

Read: levers to convert policy inertia into policy traction p. 13-20, but browse the tables.

Read: Panel 6 and define ultraprocessed.

For class on February 27

Browse: transportation, urban design, land use p. 20-23, country contexts p. 24.

Read: Strengthening public sector governance, p. 24-28
- Describe the principal challenges to strong governance

Browse: right to wellbeing, p. 28-30, Framework convention p. 30-31

Read Private-sector challenges p. 31-34, Mobilising civil society p. 34-37

Browse Cultural influences p. 37-46

Read Recommendations p. 4-end.
- Describe the six underlying principles.
- Justify the principles related to governance, the food industry, and civil society.
- Explain this report's contribution to food systems thinking and to public health nutrition.