
Postgraduate Certificate in Social Ecology

Food Systems and Agroecology

Food Systems

Food systems encompass all processes and infrastructure involved in feeding a population: growing, harvesting, processing, packaging, transporting, marketing, consumption, and disposal of food and food-related items. This includes not only the production of food but also its distribution and consumption. Food systems are influenced by a variety of factors including economic, social, political, and environmental considerations.

- **Agroecology:** Agroecology is a holistic approach to agriculture that seeks to create sustainable food systems by integrating ecological principles and social values into farming practices. It emphasizes the importance of biodiversity, soil health, and the well-being of farmers and rural communities.
- **Sustainable Agriculture:** Sustainable agriculture refers to farming practices that are environmentally sound, socially equitable, and economically viable. It focuses on long-term productivity without compromising the health of the environment or the well-being of farmers and consumers.
- **Food Security:** Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. It encompasses the availability, accessibility, utilization, and stability of food supplies.
- **Food Sovereignty:** Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems. It emphasizes local control over food systems and the rights of small-scale producers.
- **Food Justice:** Food justice is a social movement that seeks to address disparities in the food system, particularly regarding access to healthy and affordable food. It advocates for fair treatment of all individuals involved in the food system, from farmworkers to consumers.
- **Food Waste:** Food waste refers to the discarding or alternative (use) of food that is still safe and nutritious for human consumption. It is a significant issue in food systems, contributing to environmental degradation, economic losses, and social inequality.

Agroecology

Agroecology is a scientific discipline, a set of practices, and a social movement that seeks to apply ecological principles to agricultural systems. It focuses on the interactions between plants, animals, humans, and the environment to create sustainable food systems. Agroecology emphasizes the importance of biodiversity, soil health, and the well-being of farmers and rural communities.

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- Agroforestry: Agroforestry is a land use management system that combines trees and shrubs with crops and livestock in a symbiotic and complementary way. It provides ecological, economic, and social benefits by enhancing biodiversity, improving soil fertility, and diversifying income sources.
- Permaculture: Permaculture is a design system that mimics natural ecosystems to create sustainable human settlements and agricultural systems. It focuses on principles such as observation, diversity, and integration to maximize productivity while minimizing negative impacts on the environment.
- Regenerative Agriculture: Regenerative agriculture is a holistic approach to farming that aims to restore and enhance the health of ecosystems by rebuilding soil organic matter, sequestering carbon, and improving water cycles. It focuses on practices that regenerate rather than deplete natural resources.
- Food Justice: Food justice is a social movement that seeks to address disparities in the food system, particularly regarding access to healthy and affordable food. It advocates for fair treatment of all individuals involved in the food system, from farmworkers to consumers.

Biodiversity

Biodiversity refers to the variety and variability of life forms on Earth, including plants, animals, fungi, and microorganisms. It encompasses genetic diversity, species diversity, and ecosystem diversity. Biodiversity is essential for the functioning of ecosystems, providing services such as pollination, nutrient cycling, and pest control.

- Ecosystem Services: Ecosystem services are the benefits that humans derive from ecosystems, including provisioning services (such as food and water), regulating services (such as climate regulation and flood control), cultural services (such as recreation and spiritual enrichment), and supporting services (such as soil formation and nutrient cycling).
- Genetic Diversity: Genetic diversity refers to the variety of genes within a species or population. It is important for adaptation to changing environmental conditions, resistance to diseases and pests, and the long-term survival of species.
- Species Diversity: Species diversity refers to the variety of different species in a given area. It is a measure of the richness and evenness of species distribution within an ecosystem.
- Ecosystem Diversity: Ecosystem diversity refers to the variety of different ecosystems in a region or on Earth. It includes different types of habitats, such as forests, wetlands, grasslands, and coral reefs.

Climate Change

Climate change refers to long-term changes in temperature, precipitation, and other atmospheric conditions on Earth. It is primarily driven by human activities, such as the burning of fossil fuels and deforestation, which release greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. Climate change has far-reaching impacts on food systems, agriculture, and ecosystems.

- Greenhouse Gases: Greenhouse gases are gases that trap heat in the Earth's atmosphere, leading to the

greenhouse effect. The main greenhouse gases include carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide, and fluorinated gases.

- Global Warming: Global warming is the long-term increase in Earth's average surface temperature due to human activities that increase greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere. It has significant impacts on weather patterns, sea levels, and ecosystems.
- Adaptation: Adaptation refers to adjustments in natural or human systems in response to actual or expected climate change. It includes changes in practices, processes, and structures to reduce vulnerabilities and increase resilience to climate impacts.
- Mitigation: Mitigation refers to actions that reduce or prevent the emission of greenhouse gases, thereby reducing the extent of climate change. It includes efforts to transition to renewable energy sources, improve energy efficiency, and conserve forests.

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) is a partnership between farmers and consumers that allows individuals to purchase a share of a farm's harvest in advance. Consumers pay the farmer at the beginning of the season and receive a weekly or monthly supply of fresh produce throughout the growing season. CSA promotes a direct relationship between farmers and consumers, supports local agriculture, and encourages sustainable farming practices.

- Local Food: Local food refers to food that is produced, processed, and consumed within a specific geographic region. It emphasizes short supply chains, seasonal eating, and support for local farmers and businesses.
- Farmers' Markets: Farmers' markets are venues where farmers sell their produce directly to consumers, often in outdoor or indoor settings. They provide an opportunity for farmers to connect with consumers, promote local food, and support sustainable agriculture.
- Food Hubs: Food hubs are facilities that aggregate, distribute, and market locally produced food to consumers, institutions, and retailers. They serve as intermediaries between farmers and buyers, helping to increase access to local food and support regional food systems.
- Urban Agriculture: Urban agriculture refers to the practice of cultivating, processing, and distributing food in urban areas. It includes rooftop gardens, community gardens, and backyard farming, and plays a role in increasing food security, promoting sustainability, and enhancing community resilience.

Food Security

Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. It encompasses the availability, accessibility, utilization, and stability of food supplies. Food security is influenced by a variety of factors, including economic, social, political, and environmental considerations.

- Food Insecurity: Food insecurity exists when people lack reliable access to adequate food due to limited resources or other constraints. It can lead to malnutrition, hunger, and poor health outcomes, and is often exacerbated by poverty, conflict, and environmental degradation.

- **Malnutrition:** Malnutrition refers to deficiencies, imbalances, or excesses in a person's intake of nutrients. It includes undernutrition (insufficient intake of calories or essential nutrients), overnutrition (excessive intake of calories or unhealthy foods), and micronutrient deficiencies (lack of essential vitamins and minerals).
- **Food Deserts:** Food deserts are areas with limited access to affordable and nutritious food, particularly fresh fruits and vegetables. They are often found in low-income urban and rural communities, where residents may rely on convenience stores or fast food outlets for their meals.
- **Food Sovereignty:** Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems. It emphasizes local control over food systems and the rights of small-scale producers.

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Food waste refers to the discarding or alternative use of food that is still safe and nutritious for human consumption. It includes food that is thrown away by households, retailers, and food service providers, as well as food that is lost during production, processing, and distribution. Food waste is a significant issue in food systems, contributing to environmental degradation, economic losses, and social inequality.

- Food Loss: Food loss refers to the decrease in food quantity or quality that occurs at various stages of the supply chain, from production to consumption. It includes losses due to spoilage, pests, mishandling, and other factors, and can occur in both developing and developed countries.

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Food Deserts

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Greenhouse Gases

Greenhouse gases are gases that trap heat in the Earth's atmosphere, leading to the greenhouse effect. The main greenhouse gases include carbon dioxide (CO₂), methane (CH₄), nitrous oxide (N₂O), and fluorinated gases. Human activities, such as burning fossil fuels, deforestation, and agriculture, have significantly increased the concentrations of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, leading to global warming and climate change.

- Carbon Dioxide: Carbon dioxide is a colorless, odorless gas produced by the combustion of fossil fuels, deforestation, and other human activities. It is the most abundant greenhouse gas in the atmosphere and is a major contributor to climate change.
- Methane: Methane is a potent greenhouse gas produced by livestock digestion, rice cultivation, landfills, and natural gas extraction. It is more than 25 times as effective as carbon dioxide at trapping heat in the atmosphere over a 100-year period.
- Nitrous Oxide: Nitrous oxide is a greenhouse gas produced by agricultural activities, such as the use of synthetic fertilizers and manure. It is about 300 times as effective as carbon dioxide at trapping heat in the atmosphere over a 100-year period.
- Fluorinated Gases: Fluorinated gases are synthetic greenhouse gases used in refrigeration, air conditioning, and other industrial applications. They are extremely potent at trapping heat in the atmosphere and can persist in the atmosphere for hundreds to thousands of years.

Regenerative Agriculture

Regenerative agriculture is a holistic approach to farming that aims to restore and enhance the health of ecosystems by rebuilding soil organic matter, sequestering carbon, and improving water cycles. It focuses on practices that regenerate rather than deplete natural resources, such as conservation tillage, cover cropping, crop rotation, and agroforestry. Regenerative agriculture seeks to create resilient and productive food systems that benefit both the environment and the people who depend on them.

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- Soil Health: Soil health refers to the capacity of soil to sustain plant and animal life by providing essential nutrients, water, and physical support. It is a key component of regenerative agriculture, as healthy soils are essential for productive and resilient food systems.
- Carbon Sequestration: Carbon sequestration is the process by which carbon dioxide is removed from the atmosphere and stored in soil, plants, and other organic matter. It is a key strategy for mitigating climate change and enhancing the resilience of agricultural systems.

Local Food

Local food refers to food that is produced, processed, and consumed within a specific geographic region. It emphasizes short supply chains, seasonal eating, and support for local farmers and businesses. Local food systems promote environmental sustainability, economic development, and social connections within communities. Consumers benefit from fresher, healthier, and more flavorful food, while farmers benefit from direct relationships with their customers and reduced transportation costs.

- Community Supported Agriculture (CSA): Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) is a partnership between farmers and consumers that allows individuals to purchase a share of a farm's