Sustainability and the Future of Food
Fall 2022
ANST-GA 2500-004
Prof. Matthew Hayek
Matthew.hayek@nyu.edu

Class Schedule
Wednesday 2 - 4:30 PM

Office Hours:
Monday and Thursday 2 – 4 PM by appointment
link to appointment calendar

Sustainability and the Future of Food offers an overview of global food systems and their impacts on the environment and animals, followed by a deep dive into thinking creatively about their potential solutions.

**Sustainability** pertains to the pursuit of better lives while maintaining a habitable planet. But whose lives count in this pursuit, and what room is there for nonhuman animals in this framework? This class will be guided by a concept from sustainability and social justice called **informed agitation**: to tackle solutions, we first need to describe the problems carefully and correctly. We will draw from science, economics, and social theory to understand impacts more deeply.

Readings and classroom discussions guide students to identify leverage points for change. We will discuss how government, non-profits, and markets can help scale solutions. We will also draw from scientific fields to estimate the effects of large-scale changes to the global food system and their consequences for a livable planet both for humans and nonhuman animals. Guest speakers will also visit us to share their unique approaches to tackling our food system’s impacts on the environment and animals.

**Grading rubric:**
10% class participation
10% reading responses online
20% midterm papers
15% student presentations
45% final papers

Students will engage with weekly readings on NYU Brightspace forums. Each week, students will respond to at least one reading (selecting from those marked with an
asterisk*) in 5 to 10 sentences describe what the author is arguing, how they’re defending their position, and why they seem to be pursuing their respective topic or question. Additional, more specific questions may also be posted, by Friday at the latest, with responses due the following Tuesday night before class on Wednesday.

Much of the grade for this course is based around research projects, with a single topic that spans two papers and a presentation. Students will be expected to decide on a research topic, in the form of a regional or global food system problem, by October 19.

The midterm paper will explore a potential solution to their problem in 2,500-3,000 words. Right after the break, students will sign up to briefly present on their papers in weeks 10-13. Presentations will give students the chance to solicit feedback on the food system solution they proposed in their midterms and prompt discussion between classmates. Feedback from the classroom presentations will help students deepen their understanding and refine their ideas for a more nuanced solution to the same problem their final papers (4,000 words).

This class will also give students an opportunity to engage with guest speakers, namely practitioners who are developing and executing novel solutions to problems in food and sustainability. Students are expected to engage both critically and graciously. Remember that our guests are taking time out of their busy schedules to share their accumulated wisdom with the class. This means being our most polite and grateful selves, but also being bold enough to ask for clarity when we’re uncertain about something, and trusting that they benefit from thoughtful challenges. This can be a hard balance to strike, so don’t let perfection paralyze you. If you are uncertain if a question is rude or goes “too far”, for instance by invalidating a deeply held assumption or foundation upon which they rest their career, hold off. We will have a debrief period after they leave or first thing the following class to engage more deeply and critically with one another over what the presenter offered.

**Week 1**

Course overview - an introduction to sustainability

**Week 2**

Population growth – Major issue or a major distraction?
- Joel K. Bourne “The End of Plenty”—Introduction, chapters 1, 3, 5
- David Roberts “I never write about population” on Vox.com
Week 3 - September 21
Climate change – the carbon cycle and the science of food systems

Week 4 - September 28
Alternatives to conventional agriculture

Week 5 – October 5
Aquatic animals and food

Week 6 - October 12
Changing food consumption

Week 7 - October 19 (Deadline to choose paper topics)
The role of local government

Week 8 - October 26
Pressuring corporations for better environmental governance

Week 9 – November 2 – Midterm papers due
Nutrition and Society

Week 10 - November 9 – Class presentations 1
Zoonotic Diseases

Week 11 - November 16 – Class presentations 2
Alternative proteins – using markets to scale interventions rapidly.

Week 12 - November 23 – Class presentations 2
Legal protections for animals

Week 13 – November 30 – Class presentations 4
Emergent topics

Week 14 - December 7
Shaping the Future of Food Wrap up

Finals week – Monday, December 19 – Final Papers due