

HORT / SOCR 424  
Topics in Organic Agriculture  
Spring 2011

Catalog Statement

Examination of issues specific to organic food production systems, marketing and policy.

Learning Objectives

Examine current issues and assumptions within the organic agriculture industry. Specifically, to understand the policy, environment, and economic climates that influences the evolution of the industry.

Course Specifics

This is a 3-credit spring semester course (even years only). Class will meet on Monday and Wednesday from 12:30-1:45pm in the Plant Sciences Building room W 212.

Instructors

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Course Materials

Instructors will choose and distribute readings appropriate to course content. No textbook is required for this course. All readings will be available on RamCT. Please be sure that you check RamCT email often or link another email account to the RamCT account so you can stay informed.

Prerequisites

HORT 100 or SOCR 100, HORT/SOCR 171, SOCR 240, AREC 202, and AREC 328 or AREC 428.

This course will be taught through guest lectures, student presentations and synthesis discussions. All students are encouraged to utilize the course assignments to develop their own style of teaching.

Chalk Talks

The instructors are defining 'chalk talk' as a brief (5-7 minute) informal presentation where the speaker describes their thought process for developing an idea (1-3 stated assumptions) and an elaboration on their chosen topic using 2-3 supporting facts. Through this presentation style each student will be asked to discuss a broad topic that represents an assumption possibly held by the public about organic agriculture. An example chalk talk will be presented during the first lecture and student talks may be modeled from this one. After each chalk talk the class will discuss any refutable points that should be noted and also any other assumptions that should be added to the list for the main topic.

Students will be assigned their chalk talk topic during the first class period. Our goal for doing this is to encourage students to explore a topic that they may not be familiar with; deepening their understanding of the subject.

For Example:

**Main Topic:** Production Systems –Labor (A 2005 SARE study found that of 188 surveyed farmers (with 70+ of them responding) more than ½ of them believe organic farming is more socially responsible)\*

**Assumption #1:** Increased stoop-labor is required for weed management, harvesting, etc. makes laboring more difficult on organic farms than conventional farms.\*

**Assumption #2:** Laborers have significantly less exposure to harmful pesticides on organic farms.\*

**Assumption #3:** Livable wages and benefits are not paid to organic farm laborers.\*

**Supporting Fact #1:** Many organic farmers do not themselves make a living wage nor have health benefits so it is difficult to offer this to laborers.\*

**Supporting Fact #2:** Even though organic products sell for more in the marketplace, production cost are higher than in conventional systems, so there is still little profit to dedicate to labor wages.\*

**Supporting Fact #3:** There is no market recognition/labeling that identifies a farm's dedication to providing its workers a liveable wage, health insurance benefits etc.\*

\* All references must be included in student outlines.

After students complete their chalk talk and classroom discussion they will be responsible for completing and handing in a 'working outline' that illustrates the breadth of their research and the points noted in class. The outline may resemble the one above with relevant resources included.

### Semester Project

Each student will choose a working outline developed by one of their classmates through the chalk talk process and further develop the ideas to create a final semester project. The final project will be split into two sections with different due dates in order to more clearly define expectations and objectives.

**First half of project:** Students will complete a thorough fact finding exercise and report on their topic. A presentation will be given during class prior to the Spring Break recess that summarizes the literature relevant to their topic. This portion of the project will describe what the topic is, and roughly identify its relevance.

**Second half of project:** Students will develop a critique, synthesis and discussion on the topic, expanding on its relevance. This portion of the project will require creative thought and insight based on your experience, previous coursework, and

research completed for this project. Students will present their final work to the class near the end of the semester. Along with the synthesis, students will develop an educational tool (fact sheet, brochure, bulletin, poster, video, etc.) that will be discussed with the class. The educational tool should be geared to inform the general public about your findings that support or refute your basic assumption.

Throughout the semester many guest lecturers will discuss topics being researched for semester projects. Students may utilize information shared through these lectures; however, the final projects should represent original thought and not simply summarize what has been presented in the lectures. Other credible resources must be utilized.

Grading

Active Class Participation	10%
Chalk Talk	10%
Working Outline	10%
First ½ of Project	10%
Second ½ of Project	30%
Educational Tool	20%
Final Exam	10%