



Food Studies at the University of Oregon: Year in Review

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Abstract

Success! We are just about to wrap up the 2013-2014 academic year which also happens to be the inaugural year for the Food Studies Graduate Specialization at the University of Oregon. Stay tuned because our food studies program is expanding. Come check us out at <http://foodstudies.uoregon.edu/>. For now, join me as I recall some of the inspiring talks we heard by our esteemed guest speakers, and learn why food studies may be right for you...food is fun after all!

Food tells stories, creates stories, and brings people together, and that's just what we experienced this first year of our food studies specialization. We heard from academics, professionals and entrepreneurs in the field of food. We created new stories in our graduate-student; on-line journal, *Food Field Notes*, and we came together in celebration of food through history, geography, science, liberal arts, and so much more. No matter the discipline, I bet you'll find food tucked in the curriculum somewhere!

Each term, Lindsay Naylor, our GTF for the foodstudies program, along with Professor Stephen Wooten, hosted a series of food talks. They brought in experts from the multi-disciplinary field of food studies as well as provided a venue for showcasing graduate student grantee works in progress, and facilitated meetings between students and community members. For a more detailed description of highlighted projects, follow this link <http://foodstudies.uoregon.edu/past-events/>.

Included in the proceeding pages is a brief overview and sample from that series of talks; we began in the fall of 2013 with a history of African American foodways presented by Michael Twitty and Professor Judith Carney; in winter we "travelled" to Costa Rica and learned about the inequality in our global food system; and finally, in spring, professor Lisa Heldke showed us that food studies plays an important role in a liberal arts education.

Afroculinaria: Exploring the Foodways Legacy of Trans-Atlantic Slavery

Our food talk series opened on October 25th, 2013. The inaugural event, in our inaugural year, was catered by Delacata food cart, a local vendor serving all manner of Southern-fried delicacies; catfish, hushpuppies, and chicken sandwiches to name a few. You can always count on some delicious eats at a food talk!

We had the great fortune of hosting two fantastic speakers— Michael Twitty, an Afroculinary specialist who uses food to tell the history of the forced immigration of Africans into the Southern United States, and Professor of Geography, Judith Carney of UCLA, who traced the techniques of growing rice in Gambia to those seen in the Carolinas during pre-cotton days.

Using food as the means to tell the story of the history of slavery and the path to freedom, both Michael Twitty and Professor Carney bring awareness and culinary justice, to the originators of what is accepted today as 'traditional' Southern food. Both highlight the importance of recognizing the contributions made by the African-immigrants, forcibly brought to the Americas, and the culinary practices that exist in the South and other regions. Professor Carney has traced the rice growing practices employed by Gambians and found the same techniques and tools used to grow rice in the Carolinas before cotton was introduced. Her work acknowledges and gives agency to the voices of the past, and to a people who have been long ignored. If it wasn't for the expertise of the many Africans who came to the colonies as slaves, we would not have known the ways of the production of rice, cotton, tobacco, nor would we have culinary favorites in our diet such as cowpeas and collards, both traditional foods from Western Africa.

Through the re-creation of and re-enactment of food production during the antebellum South, Twitty explores the history of the West Africans who were brought here during the slave trade. He honors these ancestors of modern-day Southern cuisine by using the intersection of the culinary with identity. He thus gives the African American community cultural- ownership of its cuisine through the promotion of African American foodways.

Food Systems in an Unequal World

During winter term, Professor Ryan Galt of the Department of Human Ecology at UC Davis brought to the forefront the issues encountered by many smaller nations when competing in the globalized food chain.

Situated just 40 minutes outside the capital city of San Jose rests the Central Valley— home to the Cartago province of Costa

Rica, also known as the 'veggie basket' of the country. The area's economy is solidly rooted in agriculture and provides its abundance to both local and international markets. In his new book, *FoodSystems in an Unequal World: Pesticides, Vegetables, and Agrarian Capitalism in Costa Rica*. Dr. Galt explores the effects of a globalized food system which has led to a bifurcated regulatory system leaving area farmers and Costa Rican consumers vulnerable to high levels of toxic pesticides. He illuminated the struggles farmers face as they confront strict international standards for pesticide residues and the need to mitigate pest population in a low-land tropical environment with high levels of humidity and no winter cooling period to aid in pest control.

Costa Rica's climate, coupled with the introduction of mono-culture crops, and non-native varieties, has led to disease and damaging-insect infestations, thus pressuring farmers to employ heavy amounts of synthetic pesticides. According to Dr. Galt, this area holds a 'dirty little secret'. Costa Rica ranks highest in the world for pesticide use per acre. Statistics show that 20k of pesticide, per hectare, per year is being implemented for agricultural use. Pesticides and fungicides were not always readily used, nor available; heavy inputs grew in direct correlation with the burgeoning demand for specific standards on the export markets.

Since the turn of the 20th century, Costa Rica has converted its agricultural model from one of subsistence—concentrating on crops such as beans and the slow-growing criollo corn varieties, popular in local markets, to a more industrial agriculture model based on international export markets. Dr. Galt explained that in 1910 area farmers began harvesting larger quantities of potatoes for international export as this non-native root vegetable yielded a considerable profit margin. At the outset, the production of potatoes caused little issue with pests, but when area farmers began converting more acreage to this profitable crop, its monoculture could not keep-up with the invading pests. In order to maintain high levels of potato production, it was necessary to introduce inputs such as pesticides, fungicides and later fertilizers.

The market demands on export products to places such as the US are so stringent that if an export crop is found to have residual pesticides then the entire shipment will be denied and in some cases a ban on a certain country's' exports is also a risk. What happens is the export product gets favorable treatment through the implementation of more organic practices and more careful washings for removal of pesticide residues. It's the national market that suffers by receiving the highly toxic produce at market. Dr. Galt is calling for a public health campaign and more stringent national policies and regulations for its home-produce in order to equalize the food-system in Costa Rica.

On Being Liberal: John Dewey, Food Studies, and the Nature of the Liberal Arts

Spring term and the last talk in the series, what a pleasure to welcome Professor of Philosophy, Dr. Lisa Heldke, of Gustavus Adolphus College in Minnesota. Professor Heldke has a jovial spirit and brings humor to her interactions and her presentation. She spoke about the importance of food studies in a liberal arts education. She used the ideas of John Dewey to elucidate the importance of a liberal arts education and a well-informed public. Dewey held the belief that a liberal arts education is essential to the creation of an informed citizen. This educated citizen could then partake, more knowledgeably, in the democratic system in order to affect positive social reform. Professor Heldke also applies this principal as a main component in her belief system and professional, academic life. Food becomes the lens or the medium through which all disciplines intersect. By way of this commonality, wider potentials are realized. Through the study of food politics, its production and consumption, we, as citizens begin to understand the needs of society at large. These realizations will eventually lead us to greater efforts toward food justice and other social reforms.

Other exciting things this first year out:

Our food talk series was a definite inspiration, so much so that a small group of hardworking graduate students, Craig Van Pelt, Lacey Johnson and Melanie Hyers (all pursuing the food studies specialization, along with Ryan Eanes, who took part in the blog as an early contributor), and technical support by Cat Bradley, graduate student working with Library Services, and professorial leadership from Stephen Wooten, created *Food Field Notes*. This graduate-student led blog focuses on issues concerning the multi-possible topic of...FOOD! In spring term the blog welcomed its first group of practicum students; both graduates and undergraduates wanting to explore and write about anything food related. Stories about food as diplomacy; food not lawns; food as culture and education; and the origins of the first restaurant are featured on the site. Perhaps you have some ideas to contribute or a food subject you would like to explore?

Spring Conference and Job Talk:

One of the components to the food specialization certificate is the spring conference and career conversation. In this informal setting, while sipping coffee and nibbling on pastries and fruit, we had the opportunity to converse with some of the leading professionals and academics working in the field of food. We are fortunate to live in an area that brings together the ideas of sustainability, organics, food justice, and support of the small farmer in order to create restaurants, brew pubs, food hubs, and local food products in our community. Our guests that day were as follows:

Chef and restaurant owner, Stephanie Pearl Kimmel of Marche/Provisions, and one of our city's leaders in farm to fork, spoke with us about her travels to France in the early 70s and then again in the early 90s. It was there that she was inspired by the local and seasonal markets. Upon her return to Eugene, she opened the Marché where she continues to dedicate her menu to market-oriented, seasonal offerings and Oregon wines. Stephanie was a leader in the local movement and thanks to her it continues with vim and vigor!

Micah Elconin, small business developer and the previous program supervisor at Sprout enlightened us with his enthusiastic conversation about ways to innovate in regional food systems. In 2012, he joined with the Neighborhood Economic Development Corporation (NEDCO), to create a food hub and indoor, year-round, farmers market in downtown Springfield. It is also a facility which promotes small food-businesses and aims at localizing our food system in the region. Micah is constantly on the lookout for new opportunities for local farmers and food entrepreneurs.

Harper Keeler, Director of the Urban Farm at the University of Oregon, took some time away from his pitch-fork to talk to our group. Since 1992, Harper has helped shape the Urban Farm and is now its director. He spoke to us about the importance of local food systems and fostering a direct connection with the origins of our food. Through hands-on, experiential learning, and the development of practical skills he and his team leaders bring students to the awareness of the intricacies of food production. He has also been integral in the founding of the Grassroots Garden, a Food for Lane County project that produces, each year, upwards of 60 tons of vegetables and fruit for low income households. Harper believes in productive urban land-use and sees gardens as an important component in that belief system.

Professor of Philosophy, Lisa Heldke, who was at the University to give a presentation *On Being Liberal: John Dewey, Food Studies, and the Nature of the Liberal Arts*, attended our informal gathering as well. She made us laugh with her philosophical ponderings on food. In her view, food crosses disciplines and can be found in classrooms from chemistry to literature, and yes, even philosophy. Studying liberal arts through the lens of food makes sense, for food and the issues surrounding it pop-up in all disciplines from art, history, politics, science, literature, to name a few, and through the study of food throughout the disciplines, we can start seeing connections that enable us to become active, informed, citizens in our communities.

Shelley Bowerman of Ant Farm, a decentralized urban farming collective here in Eugene, Oregon, was also in attendance. The farm is dedicated to the production of food products through the implementation of alternative models with emphasis on low-inputs. They provide education and opportunities for the community to engage in these alternative food systems.

What a fantastic year of exploration of food through the disciplines. Food touches our lives politically, culturally, socially, emotionally, scientifically, religiously and spiritually, and yes, as we have seen it even touches us academically. I am honored to be a part of the food studies program and hope that you will join us through attendance at talks, by taking a class at the urban farm, or even by way of choosing food studies as a graduate specialization. See you again in fall for year number two.

May you all eat well!

Melanie Hyers

Co-editor of *Food Field Notes*