Spring 2000

AGRI 290: Perspectives on Agricultural Economics, History, and Policy

Ronald Vos

*Dordt College*, ronald.vos@dordt.edu

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Course Title: Ag 290 Perspectives on Agricultural Economics, History, and Policy

Professor: Ron Vos   Phone: 722-6285   Office S155   Room: S-105

Course Description:
The history of changing food production, management, and processing systems will be studied. The history will be studied by examining the impacts of philosophies, religions, and world views on agriculture and how past events have brought us our present agricultural systems. Domestic and international agricultural policies will be studied. Differing views (both Christian and nonchristian) will be examined and an attempt will be made to develop a reformational perspective for examining agriculture.

An important goal of this course is that the student gains insight as to what factors impact the production of food from beginning to end. The course will deal with agricultural history, how ethics and a person's world view affects how one sees agriculture, how other religions besides Christianity view agriculture, and how Christians differ on their view of agriculture.

Prerequisites: Sophomore status and Phil 201 is required. One course from Econ 200, 201, or 202 or Political Science 201 is recommended.

Course Format
Format will include lecture, student presentation, class discussion, and occasional guests or field trips. The course will meet three times per week. Reading, writing, listening, and oral skills will be emphasized. There will be two exams, a major student presentation, and a comprehensive final exam. Students will also lead class discussions on assigned topics, hand in short papers, and complete other work. Since process (discussion) will be a big part of the course, attendance is important! You will be docked for excessive absences.

Objectives:
1. Provide a strong historical background on production agriculture, its past and present policies, and the use of land, livestock, water, and technology.
2. Examine how philosophies and religions impact a society's attitude, understanding, and management of agriculture.
3. Develop an understanding of the global nature of agricultural food production.
4. Develop an understanding of the impact of domestic and world food policies on food prices and food availability.
5. Examine the driving forces in the development of agricultural policy.
6. Examine world hunger in light of domestic and world food policies and how hunger relates to those policies.
7. Develop a reformational perspective for agriculture and food production.
8. Examine ecological implications of past and present agricultural practices.
9. Examine present agricultural policies and how they impact the environment, family, community, and nation.
10. Examine agricultural practices in other cultures, especially those in lesser developed countries, to determine what practices exist and why they exist.

Required texts: Caretakers of Creation by Slattery
How Agricultural Policy Affects You by Dicks
Most readings will be selected from the following:

- Global Dust Bowl and Food for Tomorrow by Freudenberger
- Conquest of the Land Through Seven Thousand Years by Lowdermilk (will be provided)
- The Environment and the Christian, What Can we Learn From the New Testament by DeWitt
- Sacred Cows and Hot Potatoes: Agrarian Myths in Agricultural Policy by Brown et al.
- The Arguments of Agriculture: A Case Book in Contemporary Agricultural Controversy by Wojcik
- Family Farming by Strange
- Agricultural and Food Policy by Knutson et al.
- The Just Stewardship of Land and Creation by De Wit et al.
- Great Possessions: An Amish Farmer's Journal by David Kline

There will be handout material as well required reading material on reserve in the library. All reading material will be covered on the exams. If there are items that you don't understand in the material or items that wish to be covered in more detail, contact me about this.

Evaluation:

Grading is on this basis: 90+ = A, 80-89%=B, 70-79%=C, 60-69%=D. There will be three exams. The final exam is comprehensive. The exams will each count 20% of the grade. The paper/presentation will count 20%. The balance will be allotted to attendance, participation, leading discussion, and other work. As part of the "other work" each person will hand in three short (one page) papers that summarize an article in the popular press that deal with Ag. policy, economics, or history.

Project (Presentation/Paper)

This project ideally should deal with an issue that you are personally involved in or associated with. The paper and presentation should include: the majors issues involved, the history behind the issues, economic issues involved, policy issues involved, world views that are driving the issues, and how would you change policy to reflect Christian response to this situation. The paper should be a minimum of eight pages long plus a bibliography. This is something that you should be considering already at the beginning of the term. Don't procrastinate! The paper will be emailed by you to your class mates in almost final form by 3:00 PM on the day prior to your oral presentation. Your oral presentation will be evaluated by your peers and should be a summary of the paper- not a reading of the paper. A copy of the final written paper will be given to the instructor the period that your oral presentation is given. More details will be given later. The tentative dates for the oral presentations are April 3, 5, 7, 10, 12, 14, 17, 19, 21, and 24.

Tentative !! Topical Schedule

Weeks 1-3
What is agricultural policy?
World and North American History of Agriculture

Weeks 4-7
Various world views about agriculture and ownership of property. These will include the following as time permits: Native Americans, New Age, Buddhism and other Eastern religions, Judeo Christian (O.T. and N.T.), humanism.

- On February 11, 2000, distinguished Dordt Alumnus Dr. David Mulder who works as a physician on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota will meet with the class to discuss Native American culture.
- The video "Smoke Signals" (about Native Americans) will also be used.
- First exam will be 5-6 weeks after course begins. Probably on February 25.
Weeks 8-11
Industrialization of agriculture vs. systems approach. Industrial vs. ecological views of economics. Transportation, processing, packaging, energy flows, money, materials, inputs, outputs, diversity, stability, residues in packaging, convenience, and preservation will be covered.
- On the evening of February 29, Dordt College Ag Dept will be presenting a public forum on Ag Policy. Chuck Hassebroek of the Center for Rural Affairs will give a presentation. The topic he will be covering is: How did we get into this mess and how do we get out of it. Dr. Jim Skillen of the Association for Public Justice will respond to the presentation along with Dordt faculty. There will then be opportunity for the general public to be involved in the discussion. You are required to attend this forum.

The second exam will be 10-12 weeks after course begins. Probably on March 31.

Weeks 12-end of semester
Population and food distribution, hunger, non-food use of food items.
Malthusian theory, Triage, war, famine, epidemics, infection, food as "weapon" policy.
- Student presentations
The final exam will be on Wednesday May 3, 2000 10:30-12:30 P.M.

Students will be leading the discussion of chapters in Caretakers of Creation chapters from a few other texts. You will be asked to specify a chapter soon after the course begins.