



AGSC 414 Agricultural Policy

Spring Semester, 2004; 3 credit hours

Monday, Wednesday, Friday, 2:30-3:20 p.m., Barnett 112

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Office Hours:

T, TH 1:30 – 3:30

M,W,F 10:30 – 11:30

or by appointment.

Catalog Description

To provide an understanding of domestic and international issues in U.S. agricultural and food policy. A study of major problems confronting agriculture. How public policy influences the nature and performance of U.S. and world agriculture.

A More Descriptive Overview

This course offers a multi-disciplinary approach to understanding agricultural and food policy in the United States and the world. It draws on the theories and insights of economics, sociology, political science, and history to examine the agricultural policy process and its outcomes. It thereby helps students develop a better understanding of policy-making entities at various levels of government in the United States. It also provides a broad understanding of how policy actions in agriculture impact not only farmers' incomes, but also the well being of consumers, the economic viability of rural communities, and the quality of our nation's environmental resources.

We will delve into U.S. history to understand when and why the federal government began to take an active role in setting agricultural policy, and examine how the role of the federal government has changed over time. We will examine how interest groups—ranging from general farm organizations to commodity groups to environmental organizations—play a critical role in agricultural policy formation. We will touch on the international arena as we analyze the importance of international trade to the agricultural economy, how the policies of the U.S. and other nations shape trade flows, and the controversies surrounding multilateral trade agreements governing agricultural trade. Finally, we will briefly examine how the policy actions of state and local governments impact agriculture.

Prerequisites: At least one Economics course

CourseInfo Web Site

Because we will use the Internet for various assignments, I have put together a course web site using the CourseInfo software. This web site will contain links to relevant web sites, important announcements and assignment information, and will allow you to submit assignments electronically. To reach the course web site, go to <http://cinfo.truman.edu> and scroll down to the AGSC 414 link. Click on this link and, when prompted, enter your Truman e-mail I.D. (i.e. a111) as your logon I.D. and your Social Security Number (with no dashes) as your password.

You can change your password after you are logged onto the system.

Objectives

1. To develop a basic understanding of the **history** of U.S. agricultural policy, including the alternative philosophies used to justify government involvement in agriculture over time.
2. To gain the broad appreciation of **contemporary** agricultural policy **issues** (especially as illustrated in the 2002 Farm Bill) needed by professionals in a variety of agriculture-related occupations.
3. To apply economic principles to evaluate the **impacts** of alternative policy options.
4. To develop an understanding of the policy **process** itself, including the actors and arenas involved, especially as it applies to agricultural and food policy.
5. To gain experience in accessing a wide array of **resources** (especially online resources) pertaining to agricultural policy formation and analysis, so that students can return to these resources as a way to stay informed on current policy issues in their future careers.

Required Texts and Readings

Ronald D. Knutson, J.P. Penn, and Barry L. Flinchbaugh. 1998. *Agricultural and Food Policy*. Fourth Edition. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall.

Other resources, including various web sites, linked from the CourseInfo class web site, and additional articles to be assigned.

Readings assigned for a particular day should be done before class that day, because this is the material that will be discussed in class that day.

Additional Reference Book

William P. Browne, Jerry R. Skees, Louis E. Swanson, Paul B. Thompson, Laurian J Unnevehr. 1992. *Sacred Cows and Hot Potatoes: Agrarian Myths in Agricultural Policy*. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press.

Academic Integrity

This should go without saying, but I expect you to maintain the highest standard of academic honesty, and you should hold that same expectation of me and of other students. This means that you should do your own work on assignments, tests, and papers. Any suspected incident of cheating or plagiarism will be discussed with the student and appropriate follow-up action (warnings, reduction of grade for assignment or class, and referral to Student Affairs) taken as deemed necessary

Course Outline

Wk	Dates	Topic	Readings	Due
1	1/12-16	Introduction; The Policy Setting Review of Economic Principles	Knutson, Ch. 1, pp. 1-17 Ch. 1, pp. 17-26	
2	1/19-23	Mon. 1/19—NO CLASS Policy Issues in Agriculture	Ch. 2	
3	1/26-30	The Policy Process & Government Actors	Ch. 3	
4	2/2-6	Other Policy Actors—Interest Groups	Ch. 4	
		Contemporary Agricultural Policy		
5	2/9-13	Overview of 2002 Farm Bill	Ch. 9; websites	Paper 1 & Present.
6	2/16-20	Income Support & Supply Management Programs	Ch. 11	
7	2/23-27	Mechanics of income support & related programs		Exam 1
8	3/1-5	Historical bases of income support programs; Resource Policy	Ch. 10	
	3/8-12	MID-TERM BREAK/NO CLASS		
9	3/15-19	Natural Resource/Environmental Policy	Ch. 13	
10	3/22-26	Resource/Environmental Policy	Websites	
11	3/29-4/2	Policy and the Structure of Agriculture	Ch. 12	Exam 2
12	4/5-9	Rural Development Policy	Ch. 16	
13	4/12-16	Mon. Apr. 12—NO CLASS State & local-level Agricultural Policy	Websites/handouts	
14	4/19-23	Nutrition, Food Safety, & Food Quality Paper 2 Presentations	Ch. 15	Paper 2 & Present.
15	4/26-30	World Food & Ag Policy Issues International Trade & Trade Policy	Ch. 5 Ch. 7	
16	5/3	Monday, May 3—Last class Wednesday, May 5—Reading Day Monday May 10, 1:30-3:20 p.m.—Final		Final Exam

Major Dates & Deadlines

Paper 1	Fri. Feb 13
Presentation 1	W & F Feb. 11 & 13
Exam 1	Fri. Feb 27
Exam 2	Fri. Apr. 2
Paper 2	Fri. Apr. 23

Presentation 2	W & F Apr. 21 & 23
Final (Exam 3)	Mon. May 10, 1:30 p.m.

Basis of Student Evaluations

Item	Points Possible	Pct. of Final Grade
In-class exams	100 pts. x 2 = 200	29%
Final exam	100	14%
Policy Papers	100 pts. x 2 = 200	43%
Paper Presentations	30 pts. x 2 = 60	9%
Questions & Summaries of Guest Speakers	10 pts x 4 = 40	5%
Discussion & Class Participation	Considered in borderline cases	

All deadlines and examination dates must be met unless you make prior arrangements with me. Material covered during class discussion periods is integral to the content of the course. Therefore, **attendance at and participation in class sessions is expected and required**, and will affect your grade through discussion and participation points. Final grades will be calculated on a straight scale (A= 90%+, B=80-89.9%, C=70-79.9%, D=60-69.9%, F=Below 60%).

Policy Paper Topics

Over the course of the semester you will write two papers (4 to 6 pages) focusing on policy issues, policy actors, or various aspects of the policy process. The topics for these papers are described below.

1. Interest Groups and Agricultural Policy

Interest groups play a critical role in shaping agricultural policy, by providing focused input to policymakers regarding the likely impact of particular policies on their constituencies. In this paper you will both examine the general importance of interest groups in the policy arena and delve into the history and philosophical approach of one specific interest group focused on agricultural policy. You can choose from a list of possible interest groups, or select one of your own choosing, with my approval. Possible groups include the American Farm Bureau Federation, National Farmers Union, National Cattleman's Beef Association, Sierra Club, and many others. Your discussion of the group's positions on ag policy will be illustrated and made more specific by reference to the group's position on various issues within the current Farm Bill debate.

2. Policy Analysis Paper

For this final paper, you will select a specific agricultural policy or piece of legislation of interest to you. In your paper you will carefully describe your chosen policy, including

- a) a description of the issue or situation the policy was designed to address,
- b) the history of the process through which this policy came into being,
- c) the goals and objectives of the policy,
- d) the actors involved in the creation of the policy and the positions taken by them,

- e) the actual or likely impacts of the policy, and
- f) alternative policy actions that could address the same issue through other means (these alternatives may have actually been considered in the policy-making process, or they may be alternatives of your envisioning).

Paper Presentations

For each of your two papers, you will make an in-class (<10 minute) presentation. This presentation should be carefully organized to convey maximal information about your topic in this short time frame. These presentations are an important way of sharing information among the entire class because, for these paper topics, individual class members will be doing different variations on the same general topic (i.e. examining different specific groups for the interest group paper). For each presentation you must turn in a short, bulleted or numbered outline containing the main points to be covered in your presentation and use some visual aids (preferably PowerPoint).

Questions for Guest Speakers

We will also draw on a variety of outside expertise regarding agricultural policy, through in-class guest speakers, attendance of out-of-class presentations relating to agricultural policy, and field trips. For four of these speakers or presentations, you will prepare and submit (in advance of the presentation) a question or issue related to that person's area of expertise. After the presentation, you will write a short response to the presentation. Your overview should not just summarize the presentation, but should reflect on how the speaker's comments relate to other information being covered in class (e.g. the role of interest groups in policy formation).