

Food System Governance and Agriculture (E 46)

Winter term 2025/2026

Andreas Thiel

Tutor: Elizabeth Kurtz

Please, carefully read this module outline at the start of term!

Please, register in advance: <https://moodle.uni-kassel.de/course/view.php?id=19817>

Subscription to moodle is essential for all module-related communication!

Study Programs: M.Sc. Agriculture, Ecology and Societies, Sustainable International Agriculture, International Food System and Consumer Studies, Ökologische Landwirtschaft

Time: Tuesday, 8:15 am – 12:15 pm (most sessions: 90 minutes online recorded lecture on moodle 8:15 am – 9:45 am; in presence discussions and lecture 10:00 am – 12:15 pm) – online lectures will be made available on Moodle at around 1 pm on the Friday during the week before the lecture topic is due (an email notification will be sent via moodle when lecture goes online), first recorded lecture will be made available online on Friday, 24. October 2025 at around 1 pm.

Start: 21.10.2025

Where: Room: H 23 in Witzenhausen

Website: <http://www.uni-kassel.de/go/iapug>

Contents and objectives of the module

Agricultural production is at the heart of many of the crises humanity currently faces as much as it is at the heart of issues around social and economic sustainability. It is a core sector we need to address to improve sustainability of people's lives on our planet. Agriculture is part and parcel of complex food systems spanning from input factors over production, processing and consumption to the effects on the environment. It is entangled into trade policies, knowledge production, technological development and many other regulatory fields and socio-economic determinants. In light of this perspective on agriculture this module asks about how to understand agriculture from a food system perspective, and how to analyze food systems and its relations to agriculture. What are key characteristics of the diversity of food systems globally and the multiple ways of producing food and organizing it worldwide?

Further, the module addresses institutions, i.e. the formal and informal rules and regulations that structure social processes including production but also steering of agriculture and food systems and their sustainability impacts. In their regard, the module asks what are institutions and governance arrangements, how do they relate to agricultural production and the organization of

the food systems? What are food system actors? How can we use an understanding of food systems and their governance for discussing and evaluating them critically and engaging into thinking of their transformation?

Against this background content-related objectives of the module are

- a. to introduce and practice food system analysis in relation to diverse food systems and to compare them
- b. to embed food system analysis to value chains
- c. to introduce conceptions of institutions and governance, also referring to the role of policies
- d. to enable institutional analysis of agriculture and the food systems relying on approaches of the Bloomington School of Political Economy (property rights theory, Institutional Analysis and Development framework (IAD), SES analysis, institutional fit, polycentric governance and network of adjacent action situations) but also transaction costs economics and to discuss their critique
- e. to characterize different food systems and modes of agricultural production worldwide
- f. to discuss aspects of core institutions and governance arrangements shaping the food system (formal and informal institutions, property rights, value chains, transaction costs, power, cooperatives, standards)
- g. to characterize the main actors and actor groups shaping agriculture and food systems through institutions and governance
- h. to introduce and discuss modes and aims of food system transformation

Further, the module has a couple of aims in relation to setting up the Master program Agriculture, Ecology and Societies (AGES) at University of Kassel which, however, are also relevant for studies in other Master programs. Specifically, it aims to provide a first introduction to inter- and transdisciplinary work and its underlying rationale and to work on transformation and the role of universities within. In relation to the AGES program this relates to developing first thoughts on inter- and transdisciplinary projects as part of the AGES program. Further, it aims at introducing to the way studying works at German universities. These contents, however, are considered of relevance well beyond the AGES Master so that students from other programs continue to be very welcome.

Methods and approach

The module is largely run in a blended mode. Large parts (but not all) of substantive materials are delivered through recorded 90 minutes lectures each week. It is expected that students will have viewed the recorded lectures in advance of the presence meeting as otherwise following the presence meeting is difficult for students and lecturers. For raising questions regarding recorded lectures there will be an online moodle forum to share discussions and questions among all students and lecturers. Further, during in-presence meetings open questions will be discussed in regard to recorded lectures and contents will be practiced. Further, at certain occasions during in-presence meetings, selected literature concerning recorded lectures will be discussed. Also, extensions of materials will be delivered. Substantive discussions will be followed by issuance of questions of repetition via moodle. These questions serve to prepare for the assessed final module conversations. Students should use them to check if they are on top of the lecture materials.

Character of presence meetings is to be largely interactive. Numerous discussions will go beyond the core module materials but are also to provide background to the AGES program more in general.

Further, an important part of the module is a group exercise on Food System Analysis which needs to be presented in-class at two occasions.

Further details on materials and teaching methods:

- a. Preparation of all participants through directed reading of the relevant literature (for each session literature is available on moodle, grouped into core and advanced readings).

Literature relevant for a specific session will be made available at least two weeks in advance. Students are expected to read the literature specified for each substantive session before or in parallel of following the recorded lecture.

- b. Explanation of the main topics and the “chain of thoughts and arguments” by the lecturers, mainly in recorded lectures but partly also in presence meetings;
- c. Small group and literature discussions within lectures,
- d. Guided group work on food system analysis and analyzing the role of actors, institutions and governance for food systems as well as development of transformation pathways
- e. Self- and group study based on weekly questions of repetition and food system analysis experience to prepare for an oral, marked small group discussion of course contents after the module ends

Desirable previous knowledge for participation in the module

Interest and knowledge of Agricultural and Environmental Policy Studies, study of governance of agriculture and the food system, Economics, Environmental and Resource Economics, Development Economics.

Moodle

For participation in the course students are required to subscribe to the internet platform Moodle of University of Kassel. It can be found under <https://moodle.uni-kassel.de/moodle/index.php>

Here the link to the module itself:

<https://moodle.uni-kassel.de/course/view.php?id=19817>

The course is openly accessible.

Details - course work:

- a) Literature discussions – mandatory participation and reading (unmarked submissions of questions to moodle forum before discussions) – 3-4 times during term.

At several occasions it is planned that literatures will be discussed in small groups in class (presence sessions) which relate to substantive contents. To prepare for these discussions students need to read the literature that is indicated in this regard before meetings. Literatures will be assigned after the session two weeks ahead of the meetings. Indications what articles need to be read for what sessions will be communicated in class and most of all via moodle/ email. Students are required to do the corresponding readings. Each student needs to submit questions in regard to the article to an online forum in moodle shared among all students. Comments need to be shared by 8 pm Monday evening, i.e. on the day before the meeting.

Literature discussions in general should follow the kind of structure below, to the extent applicable.

1. What is the theme/ topic of the paper and what is its relevance to the module discussions?
2. What is the theoretical/ conceptual frame the paper uses? What is therefore its positioning? What could be alternative positionings? What do you like about the positioning/ frame, what do you miss?
3. Does the paper use data or is it purely conceptual, or a comment?
4. What is the method the paper uses for data gathering and analysis? Is the method well-suited, well-documented and well-executed in your view? How is the data gathered? How is the data analyzed? Is the method convincing?
5. Does the data relate well to the concepts studied? Is it meaningful in that regard?
6. What are the main findings of the paper? Do the findings answer the question properly?

7. Are the findings presented and discussed in a convincing manner or are important issues left out?
8. Does the discussion relate the paper to broader related issues/ literatures and help us situate the findings?
9. Are limitations made explicit?
10. What critique could be raised against the paper once we adopt a different conceptual frame and more in general (methods, data, writings style, conclusions-making)?
11. Do you find the paper convincing?

b) Food system analysis and the role of institutions and governance for transformation (45% of overall module mark)

Throughout term, attendance of the module will be accompanied by group work (3-4 group members) on the analysis of a particular food system (details see guideline on the Food Systems and Institutional Analysis exercise in moodle). Food systems to be analysed are to be selected by the groups themselves and groups are to be fixed by Wednesday 5 November. Choices need to be communicated to Ebbe Kurtz **by 10 November in the evening providing the following concise information.**

1. Group members,
2. food system,
3. products focussed upon,
4. expected data access
5. reasons for choice

It is allowed to later on diverge from some of choices (2-5) but only in reasoned cases.

Food system and institutional analysis work is to be presented at two occasions during term. 16 December and 27 January). At each occasion groups have 20 minutes for presentation and 10 minutes for moderated discussion which groups have to facilitate themselves. Time management is vital in each case. Each of the presentations of food systems work will be marked and accounts for 40% of the final mark of this part of the course work. Assessment criteria will be shared in the module.

Further, on 6 March 2026 a report on the Food Systems and Institutional Analysis exercise needs to be submitted that includes the presentations, a group-wide agreed personal assessment of the food system and products you looked at and how you would suggest to engage with it quite concretely in order to transform the food system towards more sustainability. Thus, how would you like to become active to improve sustainability in the corresponding food system? An outline of concrete engagement and potential transformation pathways and upscaling (generalization) potentials towards enhanced sustainability of the particular food system should be indicated (worth 20% of this part of the mark of the module). Text beyond presentations should not surpass 1500 words.

c) Students' transformation statements (10% of overall final mark, assessed as 5.0 (unsatisfactory) if not accomplished)

Based on group work on 2 December individual students are asked to record a short video (3-5 minutes) where they explain and position themselves in regard to needs and approaches to transformation. Videos do not need to be fancy. Videos should answer the following questions (see also below):

- Where do you come from?

- What worries you about the food system you are accustomed to at home?
- For your particular home context, what needs for transformation / transition, change, do you see, why?
- What leverage points? What type?
- What kinds of measures would you have in mind, at what level, addressing what?
- What do you personally want to address, why and how?
- How do you think institutions, governance and policies may play a role?
- What is transformation, transition for you?

These videos need to be uploaded on moodle by 18. December. In the session on 13. January you will be asked to map fellow-students of the module cohort in relation to the statements. Each group classifies another one in relation to a number of dimensions, such as region, type of issue, perspective on transformation, agency, studies-related task, etc.

d) Final marked oral module discussion (45 % of overall module mark)

For all relevant sessions (recorded or presence) questions of repetition concerning module contents will be issued. Together with the Food system and Institutional analysis exercise these will form the basis of a 25 minutes assessed discussion, each with 3 participants of the module. The discussion will be marked individually. Dates and times for these small group discussions will be issued by 23 January latest. Exams are currently planned for 18 and 19 February.

Contacts and Office Hours

Section "International Agricultural Policy and Environmental Governance"

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Prof. Dr. Andreas Thiel, monastery, room 1120

Office hours: Thursday 11:00 – 12:00 except 13. + 20. November 2025 and 18 December, please, try to agree attendance of office hours by email in advance. Meetings can also be held via zoom!

Also outside of term upon previous agreement by email: thiel@uni-kassel.de

Tutor: Elizabeth Kurtz (Ebbi)

As a tutor I provide guidance the food system analysis and on using Milanote as a tool for organizing and visualizing ideas for the assessment. I can also offer support for alternative mapping methods if preferred.

Additionally, I am here to support students with any questions related to course or group organization and seminar tasks.

I offer dedicated meeting times on Fridays via zoom which will be announced in due course.

Simply reach out to me via e-mail to schedule a session.

uk099132@student.uni-kassel.de

	Date	Online	Presence in class usually 10:00 am – 12:15 pm
1.	21.10.2025	No online input, start at 8:15 am	First meeting (only) start at 8:15 am <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introductions • Expectations (groups) • Introduction to course work • Feedback to program (break out groups) • Intro: how to study in Germany and at Uni Kassel • Sciences, frameworks and theories
2.	28.10.	Food systems and their study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questions and exercises on food systems (30 minutes) • Positions, disciplines, frames in the social sciences – disciplinary, multi-disciplinarity, interdisciplinarity, transdisciplinarity, and why (60 minutes) • Introduction to food system analysis exercise (Elisabeth Kurtz) (30 minutes)
3.	4.11.	Institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questions and exercises on institutions (30 minutes) • Food system mapping and stakeholder analysis (Dr. Nora Schütze) (75 minutes) • How to work with literature and sources, and why? What is a literature review? (15 minutes)
4.	11.11.	Food system governance, its role and its study, resilience, sustainability and telecoupling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questions and exercises on food systems and its governance (15 minutes) • Input and discussion on actors and power (in food systems and institutional analysis) (Manuel Diaz Baca) (75 minutes) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is a good presentation? (20 minutes)
5.	18.11.	Overview: Mapping the study of institutions in the food system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A systemic perspective on the urban food system: Cows in the City (Prof. Eva Schlecht) (60 minutes) • From research to change: transdisciplinary cooperation for transformation – the case of heterogenous seed populations (Dr. Odette Wheedon) (60 minutes)
6.	25.11.	Transformation and its study, the roles of institutions and governance, and how to engage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short reflection on the Role Play in Frankenhausen (15 minutes) • Questions and exercises, discussion of literature, lecture (60 minutes + 45 minutes literature)
7.	2.12.	Types of farming and their underlying institutions	<p>Questions and exercises, discussion of literature, lecture (60 minutes)</p> <p>Discussion on students' transformation statements in small discussion groups (60 minutes)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where do you come from? • What worries you about the food system you are accustomed to at home?

	Date	Online	Presence in class usually 10:00 am – 12:15 pm
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For your particular home context, what needs for transformation / transition, change, do you see, why? • What leverage points? What type? • What kinds of measures would you have in mind, at what level, addressing what? • What do you personally want to address, why and how? • How do you think institutions, governance and policies may play a role? <p>What is transformation, transition for you? Relate to input on 25 November (planned) on “Transformation and its study, the roles of institutions and governance, and how to engage”</p>
8.	09.12.	Property rights theory I	<p>Questions and exercises, discussion of literature, lecture (45 minutes)</p> <p>Interim evaluation of module (15 minutes)</p> <p>In relation to exercise of 2 December (60 minutes):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Input AGES Students • What could be a concrete student-work at Uni Kassel that engages with a transformation idea? • How to design an interdisciplinary student project? What to do? What do you want to do? How to make it concrete? <p>Our role (academics and students), role of universities and science in transformation (30 minutes)</p>
9.	16.12.	Property rights theory II - Collective action theory & IAD [& SES & Co-management & NAS & PG]	<p>Questions and exercises, discussion of literature, lecture (15 minutes)</p> <p>First presentations – Food System Governance Analysis (105 minutes)</p>
10.	13.1.	Cooperatives	<p>Questions and exercises, discussion of literature, lecture (60 minutes)</p> <p>Re-visiting transformation statement videos (30 minutes)</p>
11.	20.1.	Contract theory	Questions and exercises, discussion of literature, lecture
12.	27.1.	Transaction costs economics and value chains	<p>Questions and exercises, discussion of literature, lecture (15 minutes)</p> <p>Final presentations – Food System Governance Analysis (105 minutes)</p>
13.	3.2.	Institutional change, Policy process theory (Multiple Streams	<p>Questions and exercises, discussion of literature, lecture (75 minutes)</p> <p>Wrap-up exercises (45 minutes (incl. evaluation questionnaire)</p>

	Date	Online	Presence in class usually 10:00 am – 12:15 pm
		Framework) and implementation theory	
14.	10.2.	Standards	The transformative potential of organic farming in Europe and worldwide – Jörn Sanders (Fibl)